

Belmont Public Library

Expansion Project Report

Prepared

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Introduction

The trustee's would like to start this report by thanking the member's of the Capital Improvements Committee for reviewing the needs of our town's public library. Please find your Capital Project Worksheet and Submission Form indexed as Exhibit A1-2.

Governor Shaheen is quoted upon the dedication of the Tilton/Northfield Library to say, "Libraries are a critical part of a community" (Exhibit B1-3). The trustee's agree and nowhere better than New England has public libraries proved this statement to be true.

Back in 2001, Rebecca Tsaros of the Concord Monitor did a very nice report of the state of the library, the building and the feelings of the selectmen (Exhibit C1-2).

I also would like to give the members a copy of a letter I wrote back in January 5, 1999 that seemed to be the start for me of the building project for the library. (Exhibit D1-2).

History of the Duffy Memorial Library

The Belmont Public Library has been in place since 1893 as evidenced by its first published annual report as part of the Town Report for the year ending February 15, 1894. The library began operations on the second floor of the Johnson Block over Stevens Store and then relocated after one year to the second floor of the new Hose House. It would be 34 years later that the Library would again be relocated to its current location and building. (Exhibit E1)

George and Walter Duffy at the town meeting held on February 1927 presented a motion to offer the town a new library building, equipment, books and trust fund for the enjoyment and welfare of the citizens of Belmont. The citizens at the town meeting voted unanimously to accept the Duffy's offer. (Exhibit F1) One year later, on February 4th, 1928, the new library was dedicated for the use to the citizens of Belmont.

The library building has been described as the "finest examples of the Colonial Revival in the region and one of the state's best small library buildings". (Exhibit G1-3)

In 1985, the library was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The library building comprises a total of 2,204 square feet within its two floors. The basement contains a bathroom, furnace room and a large open area. The large room in the basement had been used as a meeting room until 2002 when the library renovated the room to be used as solely has a children's library.

Current Library Facts and Comparisons Establishing Needs

Back in the latter part of 2001, the library researched statistical information of the library compared to others in the county, state and country. These numbers are now two to three years old but are still relevant today when judging the state of our town library as it is currently.

By taking the statistics of every town's library in Belknap county it was distressing to see Belmont ranked lowest by a significant margin for books per person and second lowest for expenditures per person. (Exhibit H1-5) Belmont has 1.49 books per person and the Belknap County average is 3.56. The average expenditure per person in Belknap County was \$24.95 while Belmont's in 2000 was only \$8.47. It's my belief the numbers of books per person in 2003 for Belmont has not changed materially. The expenditures per person for 2004 will be around \$15 for Belmont.

It should be further noted that the state average of books per person is 4.51 exceeding Belknap's average of 3.56. Statewide expenditures per person are fairly comparable to the county number.

The problem the library has in attempting to rectify the shortage of books is a simple matter of space. When the library acquires any new books the first question is how to make shelf space. The result is for every new book that is added an older less demanded book is removed and packed away for future sale, donation or disposal.

The shortage of space also has reduced any reading area for the patrons and has limited the number of computers the library may provide to three. The recent loss of the downstairs meeting room for a children's room has caused the loss of another community meeting room when the town only has the Corner Meeting House, as it's only option.

Belmont's library situation is not uncommon. Many New Hampshire communities have libraries built in the early twentieth century that were constructed to support a community one-tenth their current population. Most of these same communities have already rectified the space with additions. Northfield/Tilton, Loudon, Barnstead, Laconia Alton, Gilford and Sanbornton are towns in Belknap County that have replaced or added to their older libraries in the last fifteen years. Gilmanton and Canterbury are working hard to address their issues, with Canterbury about to go into construction. Belmont and Pittsfield are the remaining older library's in the county yet to address space expansion.

Potential Solutions

There have been many solutions passed around by various parties. The most straightforward solution has been to expand out the back of the library with an addition. The trustee's utilized \$3,000 from the Duffy Trust Fund in 2000 to hire an architectural firm to calculate the size of an addition and then to draw two conceptual plans to see if the lot would support the addition.

The result of the architectural work indicated a suggested total square footage of 9,900 for the town library (Exhibit I1-3). This therefore requires a 7,700 square foot addition to supplement the current space of 2,200 square feet. The conceptual drawings indicated just enough land space to accommodate the addition and required parking. The drawings are too large for submission within this report but could be found in the library.

Several towns followed the same pattern of building from out back. Notably, Loudon and Barnstead are prime local examples (Exhibit J1). Both were accomplished by blending in new with old. Both also changed their main entrance to the newer sections as does our conceptual layouts.

Because of the limited lot size the architectural firm suggested building a completely new library on the town land of about 5 acres by the Mill. Two major concerns came from this suggestion. The loss of using a portion of the Duffy Fund for construction was reviewed and confirmed. Currently the Duffy Fund is about \$300,000 and can only be used to maintain and expand the current physical facility. The trustee's were hoping to use a balance of this fund to defer the cost to the taxpayers. The second problem was the loss of use of a historical property that originated as a library. This feeling comes from the heart. Maybe if the future purpose of the old building could be found it may reduce the ill feelings it creates. A third problem to this suggestion comes from the fact the town recently considered this same property for a new town hall.

Another solution came about when the school district was proposing removing the Gale School. We reviewed the property and felt the property was in too much disrepair, cost prohibitive per square foot, less than the 9,900 square feet suggested by the architectural firm with only 5,100 sq ft and the same concerns of losing the Duffy building as mentioned above.

Potential Solutions - Continued

Another solution revolved around acquiring the abutting bank property when it was listed for sale on 2000 and 2001 in the real estate MLS for approximately \$150,000. The trustee's felt it was an important Main Street property with a fair price and very valuable green space for the town and library. The trustee's felt a annex type library building would not be the best all-round solution because of needed staffing and loss of centralized library functions. It is still a valid option since the property did not sell and the current owner may still be approachable. It was the belief of myself that the town was also considering the property but that turned out to be fictitious. One past selectman suggested closing Mill Street to make one continuous green area.

If the larger village concept is considered the town could still attempt to acquire this property to address town hall space issues, provide valuable green space and better allow the library to expand out without a complete loss of Main Street and bandstand green space.

Current State of the Building Project

The trustee's established a capital reserve fund based on the recommendation of a prior town administrator. The goal was to have \$250,000 saved before going forward to the public for bonding for the balance. The project had a rough estimate of cost ranging from \$750,000 to \$1,250,000. Based on an addition of 7,700 sq ft times an sq ft cost of \$125 the total cost would be \$962,500. How accurate is the \$125 cost per sq ft has not been confirmed.

Therefore, the trustee's felt a five-year plan of requesting \$50,000 a year to the capital reserve with the sixth year for bonding the project was the goal. During this five-year period the trustee's will attempt to solicit grants and donations. Also they would form a Library Building Committee and garner public support.

The real result of the five-year plan with 2004 being the fifth year has not been to the trustee's expectation and goals. The selectmen have reduced the \$50,000 request each year to \$25,000. Applying and researching grants are beyond the trustee's capacity. In addition, the state library and other town library trustee's have told us they were not able to get any grant money for other library projects. The one exception was Lancaster, which secured federal monies but mostly to cover the cost of the ADA portion of their building project. The Belmont Library has not solicited any donations or carried on any charitable activities for the building project. Finally, the Library has put little effort into establishing public support and has only held one meeting of a Library Building Committee.

The trustee's and library staff is a small group. The trustee's are three members that volunteer their time and the staff includes one full time nonresident employee and two part time staff. Of late, the trustee's are being criticized for the now ten-year plan. It is the hope that the new Capital Improvements Plan will support and highlight the need and priority of a library expansion. It is also hoped the CIP will resolve support to which option the library should follow towards this expansion.

I have included a couple of other exhibits that assist with addressing a library project.

- Exhibit (K1) – Steps to Implement a Building Project
- Exhibit (L1-3) – Step-by-Step to a Successful Building Project
- Exhibit (M1-2) – Space Needs Worksheet