

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY (COMMUNITY ROOM)
Thursday January 25, 2024

PRESENT: Caroline Brancatella
Laura DiBetta
Mark Kissinger
Sarah Patterson
Lisa Scoons
Michelle Walsh (virtual)
Charmaine Wijeyesinghe
Shari Whiting

Geoffrey Kirkpatrick, director
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

EXCUSED:

GUESTS: Phil Berardi, assistant director/head of Circulation and Technical Services
Susanne Angarano, Ashley McGraw Architects
Elbert Eller, Ashley McGraw Architects
Oliver Holmes
Fran Royo
Anne Moore
David U.
Peter Corrigan
Texanne Corrigan
Nancy Newkirk
Molly Wladis

President M. Kissinger called the meeting to order at 6:35pm, after which board members introduced themselves.

BUILDING PROJECT DESIGN DISCUSSION WITH ASHLEY MCGRAW ARCHITECTS

S. Angarano told the board the design development phase has begun. She presented a recap of the schematic design phase, as well as feedback from the staff workshop in early December. She said she and E. Eller would also share some value-engineered options that could bring down the overall cost of the project. She said her goal was to provide the board with as much information as possible so they could effectively make a decision about their HVAC system preference and the overall target cost of the project.

S. Angarano said the three biggest takeaways from the staff feedback sessions were:

1. The curbside loop design needed to be revisited for safety.
2. Community space needed to be multifunctional.
3. The Public Services staff area is undersized.

She added that many staffers were also interested in a pavilion area that is attached to the

building to simplify setup and utility needs.

C. Wijeyesinghe noted some of the staff comments and said the board needed to remain mindful of wants versus needs. She also asked about storage in the current design, noting that it had been brought up a lot during staff the staff feedback session. G. Kirkpatrick said the staff is keenly interested in storage because there is a lack of it in the current building.

E. Eller said the architects had identified some value-engineered options that could reduce the current project estimate of \$35 million. He said that all of the items added up to \$3.7 million in savings, but some of those changes would not be recommended.

C. Wijeyesinghe asked if there were costs in the \$35 million estimate that had already been paid. S. Angarano said some of the soft costs like HazMat testing and geotech surveys had already been paid but made up only a very small fraction of the total.

E. Eller said that the biggest savings of approximately \$900,000 would be seen if the library did all of the work at once instead of phasing it to keep the building open during construction. Other savings could be seen by eliminating the terrazzo flooring and telescoping seating, reducing the number of skylights and interior glazing, using a flat roof instead of modified butterfly, switching to manual partitions, and reusing some of the shelving.

M. Walsh asked if there would be suitable storage for chairs if the project didn't include telescoping seating. S. Patterson said the board had talked about either seats or a stage, and she wouldn't want to nickel and dime the project and end up with a flat space that wouldn't work. M. Walsh said the trustees had heard from the maintenance department that storing and putting out chairs is very labor intensive, and they were in favor of telescoping seating.

S. Angarano presented four design options that came about based on recent feedback. In all options, there is a reduction of 100 square feet in the community rooms.

- In Option 1, the smaller community room is attached to the children's area.
- In Option 2, curbside pickup has been moved to the other side of the building, switching with the children's area, to address issues with pedestrians crossing the curbside area.
- The third option also flips curbside and children's areas and cuts into the gallery/foyer space to reduce the overall square footage.
- In Option 4, there is one main entry and one secondary entry with a separate curbside loop.

E. Eller said that federal and state incentives help make up the difference in costs between a traditional HVAC system and a geothermal one, but there is still a shortfall. He noted that additional estimates have concluded that the geothermal option would be approximately \$3 million more than the traditional system. S. Angarano said that an additional benefit of a geothermal system is that it isn't as noisy or unsightly as a traditional system.

M. Kissinger said the biggest value-engineered savings would be to eliminate phasing, but he doesn't believe the community would support that. G. Kirkpatrick agreed and said there has long been the assumption that the library would remain open in some capacity during the project. M.

Kissinger said he thinks that option should be taken off the table. The rest of the board was in agreement. G. Kirkpatrick said that one of the biggest complaints the library heard from the public during the 2000 building proposal was that the library building would be closed with some library functions taking place offsite.

The board discussed other value-engineered options, such as whether the butterfly roof was a matter of aesthetics or function and the differences in flooring options.

M. Kissinger asked whether the savings from reusing shelving would be worth it. G. Kirkpatrick said that while shelving is very expensive, he did not believe they should reuse the stacks.

G. Kirkpatrick said the pavilion might be something the library Friends would be interested in fundraising for.

M. Walsh asked how the reduction in square footage in the community rooms would reduce the available seating. S. Anganaro said the large room would lose about 25 seats – down to 200.

L. DiBetta said she was intrigued by the plan that would put more green space and the pavilion near Borthwick. S. Patterson asked how busy curbside generally is and if it would have a big impact on people if it were moved toward the back of the building. C. Brancatella said she preferred the pavilion near the back of the site where it is quieter. M. Walsh agreed and added that she liked the closed off pickup loop.

L. Scoons asked for some measurements from the parking area to the entrance, as well as the distance people would have to walk from the nearest bus stop. She said it was unclear where bus riders were expected to walk to get into the building.

C. Wijeyesinghe said she likes the idea of all the staff spaces being together. She said the Option 3 sketch was her preferred one.

M. Kissinger said the board should decide on the amount of the bond because the longer they wait, the more costs are going to climb. S. Anganaro added that a decision about the HVAC project is also important, as well as any value-engineered options that they are not interested in.

C. Wijeyesinghe spoke about the need to address the amount of the project and the amount of the bond as separate but related items. S. Whiting said the difference between the two amounts would only be approximately \$3 million if the fund balance was used. C. Wijeyesinghe responded that they were two related, but distinct concepts for the trustees and public to understand.

S. Patterson said that all of the options for savings only add up to a small percentage of the cost after all the time and energy spent getting to that point in the design. She said she was in favor of the original cost proposal.

C. Brancatella asked the board if there was anyone who had strong feelings about the cost being below \$30 million. L. DiBetta said she had gotten more comfortable with the higher number

after looking at the cost of similar-sized projects across the state. She said this is a project to modernize a 50-year-old building and should be done right. S. Patterson said she asked S. Whiting what the tax implication for the average house in town would be and was told an increase of about \$190 per year.

M. Kissinger recommended that the board work to present a design that caps the bond at \$32 million with a total project cost of \$36 million. He said he was in favor of the geothermal option but how to finance that could be a separate discussion. The board agreed with providing the architects with those general guidelines.

PUBLIC PARTICPATION

Two attendees addressed the board. A recording of the meeting and the public comment period is available on the library's YouTube channel.

DISCUSSION ON MEETING ROOM RESERVATIONS/ACCESS

The library currently has paused new meeting room reservations until March 12. G. Kirkpatrick said that the library is soliciting feedback from people who are unable to make desired reservations. L. Scoons said that a lot of the feedback she has seen is from groups with existing reservations. She asked if there was some way to have the March 12 date visible in the reservation system.

C. Wijeyesinghe said she wanted to uncouple the pause in reservations from the meeting room policy revisions because she could not promise that the committee would have something ready by the March board meeting. C. Brancatella said the board closed reservations for a reason – a situation had come about that revealed issues with the current policy that needed to be corrected. She asked why the board wouldn't vote to continue the pause without having addressed those issues. She said she did not want to put staff in the position they were faced with prior to the pause. L. DiBetta said she felt that part of the reason for the pause was to let everyone take a deep breath and get some data on who is using the space and why.

M. Kissinger said he has heard from some people in the community who are asking why the library would be seeking a multi-million dollar bond while cutting off access to community space. C. Brancatella said it was not the library's responsibility alone to provide community and the rest of the town should be aware there is a need for it.

C. Wijeyesinghe said that it would a good topic to cover at the board retreat. L. DiBetta suggested communicating the pause to the public in the weekly e-news. C. Brancatella said she wanted the public to understand that any potential changes to the policy are not because of an individual speaker but about the safety of the patrons. G. Kirkpatrick noted that the group in question was fundamentally unprepared to deal with the crowd that night. C. Wijeyesinghe asked that the board pivot from seeing the current situation and the work undertaken as addressing a "problem" to seeing it as an opportunity to re-assess the content of the policy given modern and evolving dynamics. C. Brancatella agreed.

M. Walsh said she has heard from the public how the pause is negatively affecting them and said she was in favor of lifting the restrictions on new meetings while the policy discussion continues.

S. Patterson asked if there was a way to expedite simple meeting room requests that don't involve public interaction. G. Kirkpatrick said he believed that would be considered a content decision. L. Scoons said that during policy committee talks, she had suggested a similar consideration, but the discussion is ongoing.

G. Kirkpatrick asked the board for additional guidance on two current meeting room bookings.

ADJOURNMENT

On a MOTION by C. Wijeyesinghe with a SECOND by L. Scoons, the board voted unanimously to adjourn the special meeting at 9:18pm.

Prepared by
Kristen Roberts, recording secretary

Cosigned by
M. Kissinger, board president