

**ILSLEY PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES SPECIAL MEETING  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2020  
ILSLEY LIBRARY, MIDDLEBURY**

***MINUTES - DRAFT***

Board decisions are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

Present: Board members: Catherine Nichols, President; John Freidin; Faith Gong, Secretary; Joe McVeigh; Amy Mincher, Treasurer  
Library Director: Dana Hart

Public: Andy Hooper, Nick Artim (Select Board member and former Library Building Committee member); Barbara Doyle-Wilch (invited moderator and consultant); Rebekah Irwin (former Trustee and member of State Board of Libraries)

**CALL TO ORDER**

See Board Packet for agendas and accompanying documents.

President Catherine Nichols called the meeting to order at 5:09 PM.

**STRAW POLL**

Barbara Doyle-Wilch introduced the three options for the straw poll:

1. Proceeding with the original Gossens Bachman design
2. Considering alternative designs (with intent to lower the cost or collaborate with partners)
3. Take a strategic pause

Results: Option 1 had 2 votes, Option 2 had 3 votes

**BOARD COMMENTS**

John Freidin: Favors Option 1, because it meets all of Ilsley's needs, and can be configured in many ways. He listed its attractive features, including space for children, the flexibility of its structure (to accommodate future needs), HVAC system and modern central wiring, central ADA approved elevator, improved community room, new restrooms, renovated basement for MCTV, new computer/media lab, new staff kitchen, meeting rooms of different sizes. He believes it incorporates the best of the 3 other designs evaluated by the Building Committee.

Joe McVeigh: The biggest question is one of funding. If the cost is around \$10 million, where will that come from? How much can we raise privately? We know from Christine Graham that we'd be lucky to raise \$500,000, and the rest would have to be bonded. The Select Board currently has \$3 million set aside for the library. We can't place a bond vote on the ballot without the approval of the Select Board, and they are very fiscally prudent with the taxpayers' money. We have to put this project in the context of the upcoming bond vote for Addison County schools. He doesn't believe we can get Select Board or taxpayer approval for \$10 million. He believes we have to go down a middle road.

Faith Gong: Favors Option 2 as a middle of the road option – she believes that we desperately need to renovate the library, but wants it to succeed. Right now she doesn't believe that there is enough community support for the cost.

Amy Mincher: Favors Option 2. She doesn't feel there's enough community enthusiasm for the \$10 million price tag, although the Gossens Bachman plan is beautiful. It could be that there are no other possibilities, but we owe it to the people of Middlebury to find a plan that more people are enthusiastic about. Perhaps we need to look at another architect. She was also disheartened by the lack of discussion about the homeless community that uses the library: If we want to make it a space that's welcoming for all, we need to make it a space that's comfortable for them as well. There are other things that the town needs: We don't have a senior center right now, need for a community welcome center for tourists, etc. We need to consider those things in the design. A lot of people felt that the modern design didn't fit in with the rest of Middlebury – we need to consider the Downtown Master Plan.

Catherine Nichols: Voted for Option 1, because she likes the lightness. Concerned about how much it would cost to start again with a different architect. She wants to go ahead, although she's well aware of the financial difficulties.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Dana Hart: Would advocate for Option 2, exploring new alternatives with an eye towards lowering the cost. She's heard concern about cost from members of the community. She thinks the timing is right to revisit and look for new opportunities and solutions, given the Downtown Master Plan. We need support of the community for anything to move forward, and she feels that the best use of our time isn't pushing forward this plan, but finding a new plan that would work and that achieves our objectives. At the very least, we could go back to the public and tell them that we've explored all the options.

Rebekah Irwin: We all want a beautiful library. In an ideal world, we would perhaps have the Gossens Bachman plan. She's sure the plan could adapt to community needs, but the risk is to lose community goodwill due to sticker shock. By choosing Option 2, we're not rejecting the original work, but revisiting the plan. There is a lot of negative energy in the school discussions happening right now (about consolidation and school buildings), so some positive partnerships with the schools could possibly move things forward.

Nick Artim: If you look over the next decade, we've been on a massive capital improvement effort. There are a number of things that we need coming along, with decayed water infrastructure, pressure to help with affordable housing, etc. Library is hugely valued, but if we were to put out a huge bond the success probability is not that high – it would be a difficult sell. Sometimes we have to do a phase-in approach, improving step-by-step. There may be something in the Master Plan that would entice developers to participate. Realistically, the best approach would be a phase approach.

Andy Hooper: While considering coming on the Board and talking to people, the one thing he heard the most was that the bond for the library was out of scale and too much for this town.

Barbara Doyle-Wilch read two comments:

Victor Nuovo: Strongly in favor of going ahead with the original Gossens Bachman design sooner rather than later. The Library Board needs to address how to pay for it.

John McLeod: Needs to recuse himself from the meeting due to a professional relationship with Gossens Bachman.

## **BOARD DISCUSSION**

Joe McVeigh posed the question: Are we thinking big enough? Is a smaller project more palatable, or are we just going to have to deal with issues down the road? Will a phased-in approach eliminate exciting possibilities? He's conflicted.

Amy agreed: Could we generate enough enthusiasm with Option 1?

Barbara Doyle-Wilch posited that we could do a campaign for Option 1 and pull back if it's clear that nobody's buying it. Is that how we'd want to spend our time?

Amy is worried about going with Option 1 and we have to go back and look at Option 2, why don't we do the work now by getting the second plan.

Dana added that there's no reason why both plans couldn't be presented to the public. (As in Shelburne.)

Faith feels that we have been doing an unofficial campaign for Option 1, and have consistently heard that there's sticker shock in the community.

Catherine is concerned over whether we'll get all the features that we want/need for a lower price. She'd like to think we could find some PR person who would be able to sell it (Jim Gish?)

Faith mentioned the question of timing. Dana agreed – ideally we could get this on the ballot before the school vote.

John noted that to come up with a new design isn't free, and will take a lot of time for the committee behind it to learn about libraries. It's unfortunate that when there are capital projects, everyone talks about it in terms of how much the total cost, not how much it's going to cost the individual taxpayer. \$10 million is a big number, but what does that mean for the average homeowner? He got information from the Vermont Bond Bank, and was able to calculate what the tax increase would be for an average homeowner in Middlebury.

John also feels that Ilseley made compromises on the 1988 addition, and it's inflexible. Could we really do the work that needs to be done for less? We'd have to decide what we won't do. If we don't do Option 1, he'd be in favor of Option 3 rather than build something that will be a burden. He doesn't think a phase-in is realistic, since we've got a very handicapped, inflexible building. How can we move the children now? How can we change the entrances now? Educating the public is the biggest challenge, either way we're going.

Dana agreed that, no matter what option the Board picks, it's going to be a lot of work. She would still pursue a \$5 million project, even if it didn't offer anything. Something would be better than nothing.

Barbara added that, right now the town is in an awful spot with stores closing, school issues, etc. This is an opportunity: The library is an anchor. This could be very optimistic. This summer will create an enormous urgency in the town. The library is a magnet.

Faith voiced the fact that we just don't know what a lower price would give us. Shouldn't we at least find out?

John suggested perhaps talking to architect Tom Bachman and asking what he could do for less (\$6 million?) We don't have to initially hire a new firm and start with a new committee. That's a compromise that makes a little more sense.

Dana feels that Option 2 exists on a spectrum – the first step doesn't have to be a huge jump to forming a new committee. The Trustees do have funds (\$25,000) set aside – originally to pay for a feasibility study -- that we could use to talk to Gossens Bachman or to talk with a new architect.

Barbara wondered if it was possible to say that Option 2 would be to re-look at the Gossens Bachman plan for a lower price. Dana suggested that the Board should discuss this at the next Board retreat.

John is reluctant to choose Option 2 until we talk to Tom Bachman.

Joe thinks tonight's decision is whether we're going with the project as is, pausing, or going with a middle option (which could be talking with Tom Bachman, or another option – we're going to have to live with some uncertainty.)

John is advocating for a compromise outside of the options: asking Tom Bachman what he could do for \$6 million.

Joe would like to decide tonight if we are going ahead with the plan or not. Were we to go ahead with the existing plan, how are we going to pay for it?

John thinks the whole thing should be paid for with a bond. He doesn't want to give up entirely on the work that we've done.

Dana feels that it is going to be primarily bonded, and that in order to pass a bond she's going to have to tell the community that she's heard that they're uncomfortable with Option 1. She would have a lot more credibility with the community if she said we were pursuing another option.

Much discussion ensued about whether talking with Gossens Bachman constituted Option 2, or not. John feels it's wasted time and fraught with risk. There will be temptation to go with a flawed design at a lower cost.

Dana voiced a strong desire to make a decision tonight, as this is a publicly warned meeting and will be reported to the town.

Amy asked whether the original GbA plans included lower cost options. John said that 3 other plans came in, which were less expensive but didn't meet our needs as well as the recommended option.

Faith wondered whether John's primary concern was how Option 2 would be communicated to the public. Dana clarified that, should we vote in favor of Option 2, we would discuss how it would look at the board retreat.

Nick Artim stated that he felt it unwise to ask an architect what could be accomplished for a specific price (e.g. \$6 million.) He thought that the question to ask Tom Bachman would be: What can we do, with the current footprint, to make the existing building function better, and leave it open to an ultimate expansion? The public may surprise us and want to do it all at once, but at least we're heading in a positive direction.

Dana said that sounds like another option that falls within Option 2.

### **VOTE**

Catherine Nichols called a vote, which was approved 4 to 1. A roll call vote was taken.

John: Voted for Option 3.

Joe: Voted for Option 2.

Faith: Voted for Option 2.

Amy: Voted for Option 2.

Catherine: Voted for Option 2.

Option 2 passed, 4 to 1.

### **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

John responded to the phased-in approach, and said he'd spent a lot of time with Tom Bachman trying to figure out how to work without taking down the 1988 addition, and it didn't work. Dana added that fixing the foundation would be the tricky part, since shoring it up involves tearing down both additions (she's been told.)

Barbara asked John how the original proposals were generated. An RFP was sent out nationwide, it was narrowed to 7 firms, and 3 firms were invited to meet with the committee. A New York firm was rejected as too expensive, VIA hadn't ever done a library at that time, so GbA was chosen.

Barbara was struck, at the Planapalooza sessions, by the enthusiasm and the open conversations about the College coming down (moving the art gallery downtown) – which opened up a lot of doors in her mind about collaboration. If the library planning became a part of that, the timing is right. The draft of the Downtown Master Plan will be released in mid-April.

Faith raised the question of what Dana should communicate from this meeting. Dana: the board voted to explore alternative options, excited about the possibilities of the Downtown Master Plan.

John made a motion that the Board should see if GbA or another firm could give us a good sense of what we could get for \$6 million before our retreat. There was no second. Dana felt this was something we could decide at our upcoming meeting.

The Board did decide to ask Dana to speak with GbA and determine what it would cost to find out what they could do for \$6 million. Dana would then need to get Select Board approval to change the designation of the \$25,000 that was originally earmarked for the feasibility study.

Nick Artim again advised against putting out a specific number.

Dana wondered about asking Tom Bachman to give an estimate of what it would cost to get a plan that would cost an unspecified amount less, or work with the existing structure.

Barbara advised pondering what's been discussed, and discuss again at the next regular board meeting.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

President Catherine Nichols declared the meeting adjourned at 7:04 PM.

#### **NEXT REGULAR MEETING**

The next board meeting will be on Monday, March 9 at 5:00 PM at the Town Offices.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Faith Gong, Secretary