

Many great questions were asked in response to the community opinion survey recently conducted by the St. Charles Public Library. Following are responses to those questions and information requests.

TIMING QUESTIONS

Q: What is the urgency of pursuing the improvements? Why now?

A: *1) Our population has doubled, 2) Library facilities are often full, 3) Construction costs are at an all time low.*

Our library district's service population has doubled since the last addition was built, increasing by about 30,000 residents. The current collections at our library are more than double the size of the library's capacity. Meeting and study rooms are consistently booked, and the library's parking lot is often completely full, including barrier-free spaces.

When we operate our library well beyond its capacity, the expected life of our facilities, furnishing and equipment is overburdened. The Library Board believes that it is fiscally responsible to protect and preserve this important public investment. Libraries are often designed for a 20-year service span. If the new addition is approved and built, it will have been 24 years between when the 1988 addition was built and the new addition is opened.

There also is a unique opportunity to address our facility needs when construction costs are down (both materials and labor) as well as when borrowing costs remain at historically low levels. Chicago area construction costs are down 10% to 20% from construction costs two years ago. The Board believes there is an opportunity to realize considerable savings by proceeding with plans that have been in development since 2000.

Q: How crowded is the library?

A: *The present facility was a 20-year facility designed in 1985 and built in 1988 to serve the library district to 2005 and a population of 45,000. In 2010, we now serve an estimated 62,000 people.*

Q: What is the proposed timeline for improvements to the existing library?

A: *If a referendum is held and is successful in November 2010, construction could be completed by mid-summer or mid-winter 2013 depending upon the method the Library Board selects for managing the construction process.*

COST QUESTIONS

Q: What is the breakdown of the projected costs of the improvements?

A: *The overall project costs estimates are as follows: \$19.9 million for the addition, \$12.6 million for improvements to the existing library and \$2.5 million for the parking improvements. These estimates include architectural, engineering and other professional services.*

Q: How do we know that the cost estimates of the proposed improvements are accurate?

A: *A professional cost estimating consultant (Faithful & Gould) with recent public library experience prepared a detailed estimate on the current proposed design.*

The library has a very experienced team working on the design and projected cost of the library improvements. The library's architect is Chicago-based Lohan Anderson LLC. Also working on the project are the engineering firms of KJWW and CSA Associates, Inc. and Owner Services Group. All of these companies have been involved in numerous successful public library projects. The team is confident in their cost estimates.

Q: Does the library currently charge any fees, including for users who do not live within the district?

A: *Some. Like public schools, current Illinois law requires public libraries to be funded by residents and taxpayers through the property tax. While use of library services generally is free, the library charges some user-specific fees such as fines. People who do not live in the library district may purchase a card by paying a fee that is computed exactly as a taxpayer's library tax is computed.*

Q: Why not charge patrons for books, materials and other services?

A: *Since their inception, public libraries have provided free access to, and use of, all the services, materials, and facilities the library has to offer. The public library plays an important role in giving everyone a chance to succeed.*

Q: Does our library have more or fewer employees compared to other libraries serving a similar size population? How do their salaries and benefits compare?

A: *Our number of employees is slightly above average when compared to similar libraries, but the percentage of our operating budget devoted to salaries is less than the average.*

Based on the 2009 Illinois Public Library Standards, the St. Charles Public Library is right on target for the number of full-time equivalents recommended for a library serving a population the size of the St. Charles Public Library District and the level of service the Library sets as a goal. The standards also note that salaries and benefits typically represent up to 70% of the Library's total operating budget. St. Charles Public Library salaries and benefits account for 59% of the budget including capital costs. The Library is open 72 hours per week and has four public service desks.

Q: How can we be sure the monies will be spent on exactly what is promised?

A: *The library district will form a citizen-led bond committee to oversee the use of bond proceeds. An annual report from the committee will be posted on-line and be made available at our library. The bond committee also will provide quarterly updates to the Library Board.*

TAX & LEGAL QUESTIONS

Q: How often has the library district asked for bond or operating monies to improve and/or operate the library?

A: *The last building referendum was in 1986, the last operating referendum in 1998.*

The 1964 addition to the 1908 Carnegie Building (built with private funds) was constructed with bonds approved in a referendum. The next referendum was in 1986, when the community approved bonds for the current facility and an increase in the operating tax rate to .28. At the time the tax cap went into effect in 1991, the Library's operating tax rate was only .20, so the Library lost most of the tax increase approved by the voters. The last referendum was in 1998 to restore the operating tax rate of .28 originally approved by the voters in 1986. The building bonds were being retired, so the operating rate tax was substituted for the retiring bond tax, so in effect there was no additional increase.

Q: To what extent has the library district's total tax levy increased or decreased over the past 10 years? What percentage of a resident's tax bill goes to fund the Library?

A: *The library's tax levy has decreased from .2954 in 1999 to .24145 in 2009 (an 18% decrease). 3.6% of a St. Charles Public Library District resident's 2009 tax bill goes to fund the Library.*

Q: What bonding authority does the library currently have?

A: *Public library district boards of trustees may issue bonds only after their approval by the voters in a general election.*

Q: Have other Illinois library districts pursued a bond issue in recent years to make improvements or build new libraries? Did any rely solely on reserve funds, or pursue a pay-as-you-go approach?

A: *Yes. Several library districts have had successful bond issues in recent years. The St. Charles Public Library has used reserve funds to purchase the property required for expansion and to fund architectural, engineering and consulting studies.*

Q: Does the State of Illinois mandate how many persons serve on the Library's board?

A: *Illinois Library District law requires a seven-member Board of Trustees that is elected by the voters of the Library District.*

Q: Did the Library Board use eminent domain?

A: *No. The Library Board has always strongly believed that their right to use eminent domain would be wrong to use in this proposed expansion project.*

Contrary to articles that have appeared in local newspapers, the Library Board has never used eminent domain to acquire the houses on the block where future parking will be added. A great amount of care and time was taken to purchase the homes. Nine houses were purchased between 2000 and 2008. The Board's position was to acquire all the needed property before asking the voters to fund an expanded facility. From the date of closing on building bonds, the Library is expected by law to expend the proceeds within a three-year period. It took eight years to purchase all the homes. It would have been impossible to purchase them in a shorter period of time following a referendum.

In 1999, the Library Board began approaching the homeowners to let them know the library needed their property for future expansion, and to ask them to consider the library when they decided to sell. At the outset, the Board declared that it would not use its power of eminent domain. Of the nine properties, two of the residents approached the Library Board to ask the Library to purchase their homes. Three of the properties were rental. One had a verbal agreement with the Library to sell upon retirement. One had an expanding family and was very happy to sell in order to purchase a larger, newer home in a neighborhood with less traffic. For another home, an agreement was made that benefitted both the owner and the library by permitting the owner to continue to live in the house indefinitely while the Library paid property taxes and maintained the property. There was only one situation in which the family was very reluctant to sell. In this case, the Library Board was sympathetic to their position and did everything it could reasonably and responsibly do to assist them in relocating the house. All the homeowners were treated fairly and with respect and consideration.

Q: What happens to the tax when the bonds are paid off?

A: *When the bonds are retired in 20 years, the bond tax will be eliminated.*

Q: Does the Library benefit from the County's impact fees? New homes should cover the cost of new services.

A: *No, current law does not permit this.*

The Library does not benefit from County impact fees, because there is no provision in Illinois law to allow this. (Several years ago, the tri-city library directors attempted unsuccessfully to change the law.) The Library does receive developer fees from the City of St. Charles. In negotiating annexation agreements with developers for new developments located in territory within the Library District that will be annexed to the City, the City includes a unit fee for the Library. This does not occur often.

Under the tax cap, (1) new homes produce "new" operating revenue for the Library only in the first year they are taxed. It provides a boost, but it is not sustained additional revenue; (2) the Library's tax income is limited to a percentage of the tax revenue it received the previous year. The percentage is 5% or the cost of living, whichever is less. In recent years, it has been considerably less than 5%.

Q: What is the total projected tax impact of the bond and operating levy increase?

A: *The building bonds and increased operating rate would add approximately \$2.24 per month per \$100,000 of a home's market value (which represents approximately \$26.88 per year) over last year's tax.*

Q: What would the operating levy increase go toward? And would any of the operating levy increase go toward administrative costs?

A: *If the library space is expanded, operating and maintenance costs will increase. The operating levy increase would focus exclusively on things like increased utilities and maintenance. Other than maintenance personnel, none of the operating levy increase will go toward increased staffing, including administrative staffing.*

Q: When would the tax go into effect?

A: *If approved in November 2010, the tax associated with the bond and operating levy increase would go into effect in 2011.*

Q: (Was the) expansion paid by savings over previous years? There was no tax increase or bond issue for the Elmhurst Public Library!

A: *The Elmhurst Public Library did require a referendum and there was a tax increase.*

Only a small portion of the cost of the Elmhurst Public Library was funded by reserve funds. The Library had a referendum for an \$18.7 million bond issue and also received a couple of million dollars in grants from the state. The rest came from reserves. Elmhurst's tax levy incorporates the bond repayment, so it doesn't show up as a separate line item.

Q: Will staff be added as a result of the addition?

A: *The Library does not plan to add staff in the new building other than part time maintenance.*

Q: What process was used in selecting the architect, cost estimator and structural engineer hired? Were their bids competitive?

A: *The Board complied with Illinois law in selecting the architect and other professionals in a competitive and quality based selection process. Costs were compared, and the Board also considered quality of work, comparable projects, and other qualifications and experience.*

SITE DESIGN QUESTIONS

Q: Why keep the library downtown?

A: *The downtown area is a central location in the community and in the library district. At its location at the intersection of Rts. 64 and 25, the library is accessible from all points. When the Red Gate Bridge is completed, residents in the northwest quadrant of the library district will have more direct and convenient access to the library via Rt. 25.*

Q: Why not pick a completely new location and build a large, new library?

A: *This option was reviewed and abandoned because it would likely cost significantly more money, and the Board believes the community has strong support for the current location and facility.*

This would require the purchase of additional land and significantly increase the cost of construction. Any benefits associated with economic development in the downtown area also would be foregone. There is no land available that is centrally located within the library district that can accommodate the building and required parking. It is more economical to renovate and build an addition.

Q: Will the project require the purchase of any additional land?

A: *No. The land required for the project already has been purchased using a special reserve fund.*

Q: Has the St. Charles Historic Preservation Commission provided guidance on the proposed design of the addition and improvements? Has the Commission approved the design?

A: *Yes. The St. Charles Historic Preservation Commission and the City have approved the architectural design.*

Over a period of meetings with the Commission and City staff, changes were made in the design in response to their suggestions. There are numerous architectural styles in the City, so the Library Board and architects felt that the most important guideline was to have the addition blend well and aesthetically with the existing 1908, 1964, and 1989 portions of the library facility.

Q: To what extent will access to parking be increased? Where specifically will the new parking be located?

A: *While the proposed building area will be about 100% larger, the amount of parking provided will be about 133% larger. All parking will be located south of the building.*

Construction of the parking lot will conform to local ordinances and standards. The parking requirement is 2.5 spaces per 1,000 gross square feet of building space. The number of parking spaces will increase from 107 to 250. The building would expand eastward into current parking lots, and the new lot would be located south of the expanded building. Site plans are available in the library and on the library web site (www.stcharleslibrary.org).

Q: Why can't patrons simply park on local streets?

A: *Parking on some neighborhood streets is allowed and this has been factored into the building plans.*

On street parking has been taken into account in meeting current and future parking requirements. Patrons can park on streets, but this obviously causes congestion problems in the immediate area, poses problems for handicapped patrons and many seniors, and increases potential safety problems.

Q: Will the design of the addition take into account traffic patterns and congestion in this area?

A: *Yes. The plans have been reviewed and accepted by a professional Traffic Engineering consultant.*

The site plan was revised considerably to address safety, traffic flow and access concerns voiced by the community in fall 2009. Essentially the same traffic patterns that exist now will exist with the expanded facility. Traffic will increase at the library as it will in all areas as the community and area grow over the next 20 years. Essentially the same traffic patterns that exist now will exist with the expanded facility. Traffic patterns and regulations are City or State issues, and should be addressed through the City or IDOT.

Q: To what extent does the proposed design provide protection from the weather for patrons walking to and from the parking lot?

A: *The design includes a larger covered portico (than currently exists) that will offer protection from the weather. However, due to the size of the parking lot, a covered walkway would offer protection only from one point on the northernmost boundary of the lot.*

Q: Are there any empty buildings that could be used for the additional library space needs? What about annexing more of the outlying neighborhoods?

A: *There are no empty buildings that are centrally located that provide the amount of floor space or parking that the Library requires.*

The only potential area that the Library could annex would be the portion of School District 303 in Campton Township. In 2004, as part of the library's facility planning process, Campton Township surveyed its residents and learned that they did not want to annex to the Library District. This eliminated the need for placing a branch library in that area.

Q: Is the Library Board considering a satellite library to serve residents located west of the river?

A: *The possibility of a popular materials satellite facility west of the river is under consideration and is separate from the plans now under discussion. Whether it will be pursued will depend upon the community's response to the mail survey and in the public meetings.*

The Library Board believes it is most cost-effective to maintain a main library that is as centrally located as possible, given available real estate. The recently revised (2009) *Standards for Illinois Public Libraries* recommend that "travel time to the library under normal conditions does not exceed 30 minutes." The Board supports the Red Gate Bridge that will offer west side residents easier access to Rt. 25 that takes them south to the library.

Another standard for deciding when to add a branch is at the point the service population reaches 100,000, which our library district's has not yet reached and is not expected to reach within the next 30 years. That being said, local features—such as the Fox River—should be taken into consideration.

BUILDING DESIGN QUESTIONS

Q: How much space will be gained? Why is the building this size?

A: *The proposed improvements will add approximately 46,900 square feet to the existing library.*

In 2005 and 2006, the Library engaged architects at Lohan Anderson and library consultant Richard Thompson to conduct a needs assessment survey and develop a building program. The various sizes of public collections, meeting rooms, and staff spaces needed were determined through extensive interviews and discussions with the Library staff and the Board.

Q: Where has the district derived its population estimates?

A: *The Center for Governmental Studies at Northern Illinois University conducted the population analysis. NIPC (Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission) and US census data on a block-group level was used in projecting district population growth.*

Q: Why has the library run out of space? Was it originally designed too small?

A: *The present library was designed for a 20-year service span. If the new addition is approved and built, it will have been 24 years between when the 1988 addition was built and the new addition is opened. The proposed facility is designed to serve the library district to 2030 and a population of 74,000.*

Q: To what extent has the Library attempted to make use of existing space to address the increased population and demand?

A: *1) Optimized spacing and capacity of shelving, 2) eliminated seating and tables, 3) reduced meeting room seating, 4) eliminated study rooms and 5) reduced duplicate titles available on shelves.*

Over that past five years, the Library has undertaken several projects to optimize use of existing space. The Library was designed to house 230,000 items. There now are almost 366,000, approximately 14,000 of which are electronic that do not take up actual space. We have gained space on the west end of the building by replacing as many reference books as possible with subscriptions to electronic databases.

The demand for books, DVDs and CDs continues to increase; circulation this year will exceed 1.5 million. Unfortunately, the addition of more shelving to house the growing collection has necessitated the elimination of reader and study seating and tables. Due to the elimination of seating to make room for more shelving, the library's reader seating is at 273 rather than the originally planned 390, even though more seating was added to the mezzanine than originally planned in 1985.

Also, meeting room seating has declined from 248 to 212 due to the installation of a much needed kitchen and serving area in the large community meeting room.

Staff work space has been increased and optimized to keep pace with the 330% increase in circulation since the expanded 1989 library opened. Impact included the loss of two small public study areas.

A mobile computer lab was developed with grant funds, expanding the possibilities for locating computer labs and classes in other areas, to supplement the Tech Center.

Floor space for shelving and the shelving itself have been optimized. In 2008 the Board approved a space utilization plan that included a thorough study of collection growth and its space needs. As a result, the Library modified its collection development and maintenance guidelines, withdrew many duplicate copies of book titles as well as individual titles, began keeping duplicate copies of popular titles for shorter periods, and eliminated older audiovisual formats such as audiotapes and cassettes. In May, the adult collection was reorganized to provide for as much collection growth as possible over the next 3 years. We believe the Board and staff have performed responsibly in planning and optimizing the best possible use of existing space.

Q: Will any of the improvements to the “existing space” reduce operating and maintenance costs?

A: *Yes, all systems—especially heating and air conditioning—will be more efficient and will lower utility costs, in some cases dramatically.*

Q: It took years to finally use the space upstairs.

A: *Actually, it took fewer years than the Board originally planned. In the 1985 building program and construction plan, the mezzanine was planned to be Phase 2 of the building project, to be undertaken at some point in the future as need. Phase 1 (the 35,000 SF addition and remodeling of the 1908 and 1964 buildings) was completed in 1988/1989. By 1991, it was clear that the mezzanine space already was needed to accommodate the high circulation and patron requests for group study rooms. In 1994, the mezzanine was finished and equipped, using reserve funds and a state grant.*

Q: How has the Internet, e-books and other technologies impacted library space needs? Is the library planning to expand its offering of e-books and Internet access?

A: *New forms of library offerings have in fact added to space needs requirements and the rise of the Internet has actually paralleled an increase in library patron use and circulation increases in all public libraries.*

The Internet, e-books and other technologies have eased the need for additional library space with regard to reference materials, periodicals, newspapers and portions of the adult and children’s collections. However, the equipment necessary to support Internet access often takes up more space than the space gained by eliminating physical format. Future plans for the library include expanding the current collection of and access to e-books and other electronic resources. In fact, download stations are included in the 2010/2011 budget. The Internet and other technologies have not eliminated the need for additional space associated with study areas, group study and meeting rooms. The library is committed to modifying its offering to make the Internet, e-books and other technologies accessible to our entire community, while at the same time offering printed materials and community space.

One thing is certain: most authors, publishers and Internet providers are not in the business of providing free services. Everything not in the public domain will have a price tag. That is why our library seeks to expand download stations and Internet access at the library.

The role of public libraries always has been and will continue to be to make recorded information readily and affordably available and accessible to their communities.

Q: This expansion no longer is necessary as the City is no longer growing.

A: *The Library District is 40 square miles; the City is 15. Estimates by the NIU Center for Governmental Studies are that the Library District population, now estimated to be about 62,000, will grow to 74,000 by 2030.*

Q: To what extent will construction impact access to the library?

A: *The plan is for the Library to continue to operate from the existing facility with a temporary entrance as the addition is constructed, then shift operations into the addition when it is completed so renovation of the current building can occur.*

Q: Will automated check-out stations eliminate in-person check-outs?

A: *No. Personal service still will be available to patrons. In fact, the equipment will free up additional time for staff and volunteers to assist patrons with reference questions.*

Personal and friendly service always will be a priority. The facility will be larger, but our staff’s contact with and accessibility to our patrons have been important considerations in designing the layout of the building and the location of staff and public service desks. To control costs and serve patrons who prefer automated check-out stations, we will increase the number in the new facility. However, patrons still will have the option of having a person check out their materials at a circulation desk.

Q: Will the building improvement be sustainable and green with regard to materials and equipment? Has the Library Board weighed the importance of sustainability with the cost?

A: *Yes. The goal is to provide a sustainably oriented library building with concepts that provide the best value at the least cost and ones that also will reduce operating expenses.*

Many sustainable design concepts are proposed including: A) NATURAL RESOURCE EFFICIENCY such as energy saving mechanical systems, alternative energy sources and building insulation and seals, B) MATERIALS RESOURCE EFFICIENCY including existing building re-use and recyclable materials, and C) BUILDING LONGEVITY including flexible spaces and infrastructure for adaptive future.

The Library Board has weighed the importance of sustainability with the cost of each and every key improvement. The Board is committed to keeping the cost of the overall project as low as possible, reducing future operating and maintenance costs, and pursuing a sustainable design. Fortunately, with regard to many of the key improvements, all three objectives are addressed.

Q: Where can residents see site and floor plans of the proposed improvements as they currently stand?

A: *The current renderings, site plans and floor plans may be viewed on the library web site (www.stcharleslibrary.org) and in the library lobby. Final renderings, site plans and floor plans would be developed following a successful referendum.*

Q: What would it cost to build and operate a coffee shop attached to the library? If the Library is not pursuing a full-scale coffee shop, will it at least offer coffee and beverages?

A: *A full scale coffee shop is not anticipated at this time due to initial costs and long term operating costs.*

The Board believes such an initial and ongoing commitment of resources is difficult to justify within the Library's stated goals and purpose, and when other libraries have had difficulty providing this feature without a subsidy. The infrastructure and architectural requirements of a separate coffee shop would add at least \$400,000 to the building cost. Ongoing maintenance and administration costs also are a concern. However, the plans do include a reading and lounge area with high-end drink and snack vending machines adjacent to the *Friends of the Library* permanent book sale area.

Q: Why did the library decide not to include a drive-through pick-up/drop-off window?

A: *The Library Board decided not to incorporate a drive-through window due to the considerable amount of staff time it would require to operate. It would need employees to staff the window, to handle calls and emails to schedule pick-up times, and to sort through all holds and other items and deliver them to the window as needed. Also, there is not room for cars to queue safely in the area on the south side where a window would be located.*

Q: You rushed and tore down the houses before the referendum passed. Am against purchase and destruction of some of our best and most historic, affordable housing.

A: *Maintaining older houses is expensive. Costs included taxes, insurance, routine lawn care and snow removal, routine repairs and upkeep, utilities, security, and staff time to manage and oversee. Regardless of whether or not a referendum is held or passes, the present facility needs 30 more parking spaces. The houses were affordable, but they were not historically or architecturally significant. This was confirmed by the St. Charles Historic Preservation Commission.*

Q: Did the library consider underground parking?

A: *Yes, but this idea was abandoned primarily due to the high cost.*

To meet local code requirements, the expanded facility must have 250 parking spaces. The architects and Board determined that this requirement could not be met solely with underground parking. Underground parking also is more expensive to build and has significant access and security concerns.

Q: To what extent has, and will, the Library Board use public input in making a decision about the proposed bond package and the design of the facility?

A: *The Library has met with various public groups and hosted citizen meetings in the last three years to revise and refine the proposed design. This process will continue through the referendum process.*

The Library Board has gone to great lengths over the past three years to inform residents and gather public input on the proposed addition and improvements. The Library Board will move forward with the proposed library improvements only if there is strong community support. The Board will continue to seek public input this summer before making a decision about placing a bond and operating levy increase on the November 2010 ballot.

9/15/10