Town of Middlebury

Ilsley Library Renovation Expansion Working Group

Minutes of Meeting

December 16, 2021

Present:

Selectboard Members Dan Brown (via zoom)

Ilsley Library Board of Trustees Joe McVeigh and Amy Mincher

Library Director Dana Hart

Town Staff Working Group Liaison Judith Harris

Also Present: Andrea Murray (via zoom)

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m. by Joe McVeigh.

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted as presented.

Approval of 12/9/21 Minutes

The minutes were approved as presented.

Discussion of Charge to Design Team

Dana suggested reviewing Item A and Item B into one item, changing the language to “Review the report…” noting that having two items dedicated to reviewing the report from the Working Group seemed redundant. She

also noted that she would like the language in the charge clearly require a new square footage program. Judith pointed out that it was already included in the draft charge, as the fifth bullet point in Item C. Dana felt the wording could be clearer by shifting the bullet up to the top section of Item C. There was general consensus.

Amy brought up the question of phasing, and wondered if that is something the charge should direct the Design Advisory Team to explore.

Joe brought up the question, “To what extent should the Design Advisory Team explore an alternative location?” He paraphrased a previous comment from Judith suggesting the group should *outline* options, not *explore all* options. Dana suggested that one way to address this question would be to direct the Design Advisory Team to explore the five options Nick Artim suggested, and as part of that process explore potential sites downtown. She noted the difficulty of estimating a cost for a generic site, and suggested that to really explore this option the Design Advisory Team would might want to identify actual sites.

Dan expressed that he would hate for the Team to spend too much time looking for a specific piece of property, and that perhaps it would be better to try and use generic cost estimating to explore the possibility of another site.

Judith noted that the site didn’t necessarily have to be downtown. She said that it will be important for the Design Advisory Team to be able to say, “Yes, we did explore the option of moving to a new site, and here is what we learned, and here is why we (presumably) decided to stay.” She supported the general idea of a matrix exploring the five options. She expressed confidence that the team could use cost estimating to get a reasonable budget for relocating and building new.

Joe noted that there wasn’t too much pushback on the idea of keeping the library on site last time. Amy felt that the overwhelming feedback the Working Group has received was that the library should stay on its current site. Dana summarized the group consensus: the Design Advisory Team should explore the option of a new site using average acquisition prices, average cost of building per/square foot, etc., but shouldn’t spend time researching actual potential sites. Judith noted that the Design Advisory Team doesn’t need to do this themselves; they can hire a professional to do that. Dan noted the importance of the pros and cons of moving the library, and felt the Working Group that was getting too tied up in the cost as opposed to benefits and drawbacks.

Andrea Murray commented that if you have a clear program, the cost of new construction on a relatively accessible site should be easy to model, even if a specific site has not been selected. The other cost to consider is the carbon impact of new construction vs. renovation (and possibly addition), which an architecture firm could easily model for comparison purposes.

Joe expressed concern about the difficulty of comparing apples to oranges v apples to apples.

Dana stressed that she felt approaching this project in stages (first writing the program, then exploring design directions, and then working on a schematic design) could be a way to bring the community along and avoid sticker shock. Going through the program and design direction processes could help determine the budget, and the Design Advisory Team would then have a budget to provide an architect.

Joe expressed concerns about the overall process. He felt the project shouldn’t just address problems, but should look forward to the future. He didn’t want the project to ultimately be reduced to a question of dollars, he felt because people will just go with the lowest number.

Dana said that if the Team were to pursue the matrix exercise it would take more than just cost into consideration. She felt that if the information was presented well and people understood what was possible at different price points they wouldn’t necessarily just go for the cheapest option. Amy wondered at what stage of the process this would happen at. Dana asked if the Team will want public input when developing the library program; at the very least, she felt the Team would want to be communicating the program early and often with the public.

The group settled on directing the Design Advisory Team to put together a rough budget number for a new site based on average square foot costs, and present alongside that number the pros and cons of moving to a new site. There was discussion about specific language, referencing a previous proposal by Judith, and agreed that Dana would synthesize the language and present it back to the Working Group in an updated draft.

Joe asked about design options: do we really need to do all this work over again? Are we charging the Team to start from scratch, or start where the old team left off? To what extent should that group explore new options v reviewing and tweaking old plans?

Dana noted that bringing everyone along is a very important part of this process, and if we direct the Design Advisory Team to just make tweaks to the existing plan, we’re going to end up in a worse place than we were before. Dan agreed there needs to be a whole process before the Design Team is even ready to answer that question; the first step is just revisiting the program and then moving forward from there. Dan wondered if we would need an architectural team to create a matrix evaluating different design directions.

Andrea commented that she thought this committee should be charged with assessing the appetite for a bond before engaging an architect. Any design team is going to want to design to your budget; once they have a sense of that threshold, they can design to your needs. A charge of the committee might be to hone in on that range. She shared the process Shelburne went through when determining what kind of bond was feasible.

Joe shared the thinking about creating two separate teams, one dedicated to funding and one dedicated to community outreach. One of the big issues still to be grappled with is “How to setup a process that involved design, communication with the public, and how to obtain funding. Are those separate groups? The same group?” He summarized the group’s discussion: we don’t want to give too much design direction, we want them to find the design through the process.

Judith shared that it would be important to start getting this project in front of the Infrastructure Committee, to keep them appraised of the project so they know what is coming down the pike.

The group agreed that the Team should be directed to explore design directions, but that the instruction should stop there.

Joe expressed concern that the Team not approach this project from a deficiency point of view; the project needs to be forward looking. How can we design a process that allows for creativity? Judith said she couldn’t imagine an architect in the world that would see a list of deficiencies and only address them; creativity is going to be a part of the process no matter what. Dana said she felt that one of the biggest problems with the current building (lack of flexibility) creates an opportunity to be creative, because the best way for a library to look forward and prepare for the future is to have flexible spaces. She felt that it was up to the Design Advisory Team to communicate to the public how these flexible spaces could allow exciting and engaging new library services.

Amy reminded the group about the vision supplied by the trustees. It was agreed that addressing this vision statement would also allow for creativity. It was generally agreed that it is important to not approach the project solely from a deficiency perspective, but that the language in the charge already encouraged creativity and forward thinking design.

Joe directed the group to consider cost, and how the charge should direct the Team to address cost. Amy felt that there should be a specific number in the charge. Dan felt that there should not be a specific number, because that number will be arrived at through the matrix exercise. He felt that including language to be sensitive to cost is important. Dan stressed the important of having a funding team that can explore different funding options beyond a bond vote. Dana said she felt that the process might be a little messy while we figure out costs, public appetite, and additional sources of funding, and we might have to find a way to be comfortable with that.

Joe said we don’t know what is possible; we need to not default to the lowest possible costs. Dana said she wasn’t sure how to assess public sentiment for fundraising or a bond without having at least a tentative plan to show people. There was further discussion about the need to be sensitive to cost without hampering the design process right out of the gate. The group reviewed the language in the charge re: cost, and it was felt that the language sufficiently brought cost into the process. Judith suggested bringing someone who is a funding strategist into the group now, sooner rather than later.

Discussion of Questions to the Selectboard

Joe solicited ideas about what to share with the Selectboard and asked if anyone had questions for them. Dan suggested giving an end date about when the charge would be ready. The group felt that mid-January was a reasonable goal. Joe wondered if the Working Group should be creating a charge for the Funding Team and Community Engagement Team. Dan felt it was important to discuss that with the Selectboard, and that the two additional groups could be subcommittees of the Design Advisory Team, which case the Working Group doesn’t have to create additional charges.

The group briefly discussed the two possible organization structures for these groups supplied by Judith and Joe.

The group briefly discussed the possibility of requesting additional funds for the professional design, but ultimately decided that without knowing specifically how much might be needed/not having a clear request, and acknowledging the considerable budget requests already before the Selectboard, it didn’t make sense to request more for FY 23.

Next Steps

The next meeting of the Ilsley Renovation and Expansion Working Group will be Thursday, December 23, 2021 at 2:00. The Working Group will not meet on December 30th.

The meeting adjourned at 3:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dana Hart