

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE AMES CITY COUNCIL

AMES, IOWA

FEBRUARY 16, 2010

The Ames City Council met in Special Session at 7:03 p.m. on the 16th day of February, 2010, in the City Council Chambers in City Hall, 515 Clark Avenue, pursuant to law with Mayor Ann Campbell presiding and the following Council members present: Davis, Goodman, Larson, Mahayni, Orazem, and Wacha. *Ex officio* Council Member Keppy was absent. Bradley, Budd, Campbell, Lockett, Meier, Schill, Stow, and Warnick, representing the Library Board of Trustees, were also present. Library Board President Seagrave was brought in telephonically.

Mayor Campbell announced that, along with Library Board President Richard Seagrave, architect Jeff Scherer was also joining the meeting via telephone.

PRESENTATION OF BACKGROUND ON SITE SELECTION FOR NEW LIBRARY:

Ames Public Library Director Art Weeks stated that the need to expand the library was identified sometime in the mid 1990s, and recently a space needs study was conducted, which determined the need for significantly more space. He explained that once that study was finished, Jeff Scherer was hired as the architect to get the project underway. Mr. Weeks said that the most important part of the current phase is to select a site, and that Mr. Scherer's charge was to determine whether the current site or a nearby site in the downtown area would best meet the needs of the library. He emphasized that he wanted both the City Council and the Library Board to agree on a site that would be in the best interest of the people of Ames.

Mr. Weeks showed a map of the two original proposals, Option A (expanding on the current site) and Option B (building across from City Hall). He explained that the objective was to provide a building that would meet both current and future needs of the library, but noted that future needs are quite hard to determine.

The objectives of the new building were reviewed, including energy and operational efficiency, more wide-open spaces, and avoiding barriers and segregated rooms. Mr. Weeks explained that the original thought was that Option B would meet those needs; however, he said that it also carried more concerns from the public. He noted that parking, synergy with the Main Street Cultural District, and crowding around City Hall were among various public concerns. In light of the multiple concerns, he explained that Option A was being revisited.

Mr. Weeks showed a concept drawing of Option A, and reviewed the details of the proposed building. He explained that it would be three stories high, which would be slightly lower than the Octagon building across the street, and that the 1904-1940 historic section of the building would be preserved and perhaps rented to a suitable tenant. He reiterated that the library and the Library Board were listening to the concerns of the citizens about Option B, and that is why they were reconsidering the Board's September 24 decision.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW SITE CONCEPT:

Mr. Weeks stated that he wanted the Council's input on the new site concept, which he later explained was a revised version of Option A. He reiterated that the plan was to preserve the historic section and arrange for a compatible tenant that would honor the building's history. He explained that they would try to retain as much of the 1984 building as possible, but would still achieve the goals of avoiding discrete and separate rooms, providing energy efficiency, and providing flexibility (no interior load-bearing walls), so the library could be changed as necessary. He stated that they would like the new building to last for a generation or longer.

Architect Jeff Scherer stated that one of the struggles with attempting to expand the library was making all of the small rooms and historic corridors work as a functional space, since the rooms could not be altered. After struggling with that, he suggested "Option C" as a third possibility. He said that it seemed a shame to have to compromise the historic section in order to make it work as a modern library.

Mr. Scherer said that one of the advantages of keeping the building simple and open is that they could make the building smaller than originally planned. He explained that the inefficiency of merging the old and new together required more square footage to compensate for the poor net to gross area of the historic building. He is now optimistic that they can create a very efficient building that can bring down the size, which would reduce the cost. He said that many aspects of Option A would still be in Option C, and later clarified that the primary difference between the two was that Option C has the historic portion as a standalone building with no physical connection to the library.

QUESTIONS FROM THE CITY COUNCIL:

Regarding the parking ramp piece of the proposal, Council Member Larson asked if any thought had been given to building the ramp closer to the downtown area in order to serve some of its parking needs. He specifically asked about a building owned by the United Methodist Church, which has City parking on both sides. Mr. Weeks stated that they had not looked into that, as the Methodist Church may have plans to extend out their building and could be utilizing that space in the future. Council Member Goodman asked if the church expansion would encompass both the commercial structure and the parking lot, and Mr. Weeks stated that he believed it would.

Mr. Larson said he is concerned that the City has been asked by many groups to provide some additional parking for the retail area downtown, and the proposed parking ramp for the library may be perceived as too far away from the downtown area. Mr. Weeks said that would be a discussion to have with the Main Street Cultural District, and noted that the library building would attract about 450,000 to 500,000 visitors per year, so it would have considerable parking needs of its own.

Council Member Orazem mentioned an earlier proposal to expand in the direction of Douglas Avenue, and asked Mr. Scherer if there was an advantage to making use of that space if it were available, relative to Option C. Mr. Scherer said that they heard loud and clear from the public that no one wanted to close Douglas Avenue, and very few positive comments were received about the idea of expanding in that direction. Mr. Orazem said he perceived quite a bit of public support for using Douglas, and was told that a City engineer said that Douglas would not be available. Mr. Scherer said

he was not under the same impression, and felt that the Douglas idea was not the right thing to do; however, it could be revisited if so desired.

Mr. Goodman asked if it would be possible to build the new library in phases. Mr. Scherer said he did not recommend phasing any part of this project. He said that the library actually ran out of space ten years ago, and phasing would not accomplish anything other than delaying the inevitable – that the space is needed the day the new building opens. He said he would rather see the City delay the project and do it correctly at once rather than do it in phases.

Mr. Goodman asked for a cost estimate on the new building and the parking ramp separately. Mr. Weeks stated that they have been trying hard to bring down the figure that was originally quoted to be more in line with something that Ames could support. He said that they are looking into anywhere that cost savings can be achieved, e.g. reusing old furnishings in the new section. He said the cost is getting closer to \$30 million rather than the original \$35 million price tag. Mr. Scherer said that the proposal for the parking ramp is to retain the existing parking and build a single level flat structure above it, which would hold 150 parking spaces in total. He said that the pure construction costs would be around \$2 or \$2.5 million, but noted that some costs can be trimmed.

Mr. Scherer said that he is optimistic that the building's original size has decreased significantly from the first assessment of 106,000 square feet to the current proposal of 94,438 square feet. He said they are moving further in the right direction to reduce costs and construction. Without the cost of the parking structure, he said that they are looking at total cost in the neighborhood of \$31 to \$31.5 million, which includes a total contingency of \$2.5 million; however, it is a little premature to give a precise answer.

Board President Seagrave stated that the Library Board wanted to think about what libraries would look like in 2030 and not 2010, and a solution that assures flexibility is key. He does not want to repeat what they perceive as mistakes that were made in 1984 when the building was designed for the 80s and relied on future expansion. Mr. Seagrave expressed his concern about the idea of phasing. He explained that one of the Board's major motivations for supporting a new structure on a new site was the idea that the need to increase public space in an existing structure would further compress staff space, which could make working conditions nearly intolerable. He is much more welcome to the idea of Option C, and sees it as the best of both worlds. He urged the Council to think about what downtown Ames would look like in 2030, and how a library will continue to be a gathering place for people not only to check out books, but also to carry out intellectual pursuits through various media. He said that it is important to move on to the feasibility study and find out what the community is willing to support.

Board Members Stow and Bradley echoed Mr. Seagrave's comments. They both expressed excitement about Option C, and agreed that it was the best of both worlds. Board Member Campbell stated that he originally voted for the site across from City Hall because he felt that it could build a "campus" for the City of Ames; however, he is definitely in support of this new option.

Mr. Seagrave mentioned that the Board had put together a task force, when Option B was still a possibility, to come up with ideas for what could be done with the existing facility if it were vacated. He said they found that the only feasible possible use for the entire facility would require more

expense and capital than candidates like social services agencies would be able to bear. With Option C, the smaller historic addition becomes a lot more feasible as a separate facility, which he sees as a big advantage of the new plan.

Board Member Luckett said that the new library will be a statement about Ames, and he sees it as something that could add to recruiting at the university. He believes it will establish a “vision” that Ames has an idea of how things should be in this community, and it will attract other people of a like mind.

Board Member Warnick said that she originally voted to keep the library at the present site, because there is a lot of public affection for where the building is. She expressed enthusiasm about the plan that marries the old section with something new that is flexible and can be built to the technology needs of today. She agreed that it would be more cost effective and efficient than trying to remodel.

Board Member Meier said that she had voted against Option B because she was very concerned that the current building would sit empty. She feels much more comfortable with this new option.

Board Member Budd said he voted for the City Hall site because he was unhappy with the original concept for the current location. He felt that there was wasted space and lots of other difficulties; however, this new concept is very appealing to him.

Board Member Schill echoed the other Board Members’ feelings, including the concern about Option B and a potentially vacant building. He is also excited about Option C.

Mayor Campbell asked Mr. Scherer if the ballpark cost figures included the renovation of the historic addition. Mr. Scherer replied that it includes mechanical costs, but not the renovation of the rooms. He noted that they don’t know who would move in and how they would need the rooms renovated.

Mr. Orazem asked why they would have to tear down the 1984 building in order to have a high rise structure on that site. Mr. Scherer cited several reasons, including wall quality, inadequate space, and inadequate flexibility in the current layout. He said that they should seriously consider reusing some things, such as the floor slab and footings that support the slab.

Mr. Wacha asked how probable it would be to have a tenant lined up for the historical section if Option C succeeded. Mr. Weeks stated that they would like to work on that as soon as they decide that this site is favorable to the City Council and Library Board.

Council Member Larson asked if the library would continue to operate at the current site while construction is underway, or if they would seek a temporary space to rent during construction. Director Weeks stated that they would have to find a temporary spot for 18 to 24 months, and noted that a location had not been discussed. Mr. Larson questioned if the operating budget during that time would be affected. Mr. Weeks explained that 73 percent of the budget is staffing, which they would need to retain. He said that the major expenses would be the actual move, rent, and retrofitting the building to make the space. Mr. Larson asked if those costs would be above the \$31.5 million price tag. Mr. Scherer replied that the price quote does include a placeholder for two years worth of rent and the expenses of moving twice.

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC:

Anne Kinzel, 720 Duff Avenue, stated that she is a member of the Historic Neighborhood Association which borders the library, and had been concerned about the library potentially moving. She explained that the Neighborhood Association is concerned about the expansion of parking to the north of the library, and asked that the structure not be “bare bones” in order to save costs. She feels that it would be detrimental from an aesthetic aspect.

Gloria Betcher, 531 Hayward Avenue, representing the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), thanked the Library Board of Trustees for reconsidering its position. She said that the HPC has maintained that keeping the library on its current site was preferable for a number of reasons, and said that she was very gratified to hear the word “historic” come up so many times. She emphasized that the HPC would like every effort to be made to have a tenant lined up for the historic building before the library moves to its new building. The HPC is hoping to place the building on the national register of historic places, and hopes that a tenant can be found that will maintain it as well as the library has.

Sue Ravenscroft, 455 Westwood Drive, commented on the space needs assessment. She said that since Ames is a college town, adjustments should be made since a significant percentage of the population consists of college students who don't use the Ames Public Library much. She asked what will be done to reconsider the proposed 94,000 square foot building in light of that.

Holly Fuchs, 806 Brookridge Avenue, expressed her gratitude for the library, and thinks that it would benefit from expansion. She does not think the '84 addition should be torn down, and posed several questions regarding the need for a 94,000 square foot building. She noted that Iowa City's library is approximately 81,000 square feet and serves a population roughly 20 percent larger than Ames. Ms. Fuchs said that perhaps the library is becoming more of a community center, not just a place to check out books. She suggested that the need for meeting rooms could be separated from the library function. Ms. Fuchs agreed with Council Member Orazem that there seemed to be public support for the Douglas Avenue option. She also feels that there may be cheaper ways to do the project.

Susie Petra, 2011 Duff Avenue, said she wanted to ensure that public input would be included for the design of the new building. Mr. Weeks stated that they are planning on public forums. Mr. Scherer concurred, and added that he is committed to having a public process and allowing people to voice their opinions, but he is also committed to applying his professional experience as a library architect.

Council Member Davis said that he was glad to see that Option C came around and that the current site has a potential to be utilized. He was concerned about a vacant building with Option B, and he is happy to see that the current site will be reused.

Council Member Mahayni complimented the Library Board on coming up with a plausible proposal.

Mr. Davis stated that, in moving forward with Option C, he wants to make sure that the building will truly be utilized long-term as technology changes what a library is used for. He is bothered by a \$30 million price tag, and does not want to build too big if needs may change in the future.

Mr. Larson said that he would like to see whatever they do be successful. He said that Ames has a long

history of successfully passing bond issues and supporting the library, and it would be a shame to have the project not go forward in that same way. He believes that Option C will quell a lot of the fears that he has heard from the community, but it still doesn't help the price tag. He said that there needs to be a private sector component, much like with the Aquatic Center. Mr. Larson pointed out that the Aquatic Center was only an \$8 million project, and he believes that it may not have passed without a lot of private sector support.

Mr. Weeks addressed Mr. Davis' query about what the future holds for the library. He explained that they wish to build a building that will afford the flexibility to move with changes in time. He noted that when the 1984 building was designed, the internet wasn't even imagined as a public utility, yet when it came to be it completely changed the face of what they do. It was predicted that libraries would be rendered obsolete; conversely, Mr. Weeks indicated that their circulation skyrocketed. He does not know what the future will hold, but wants to be able to be flexible enough to accommodate whatever lies ahead.

Council Member Goodman addressed the aforementioned space needs assessment, and said that he understood that it was not just based on population, but also circulation and activity. Mr. Weeks said that the driving force is the level of activity at the library, and noted that the level of circulation at the Ames Public Library is one that would typically be common for a city of about 150,000. Mr. Scherer mentioned other factors that drive the size of the building, including changes in the way that people use the library, the need for wider aisles, lower shelving, a higher percentage of books that are available for browsing, more space for tables, etc. He said that when you aggregate all of those small things together, the square footage increases. He emphasized that they are not proposing a size based on some desire to have a very big building, nor is it determined just by square feet per capita. This program is tailored specifically to the way that Ames is using the library, and Mr. Scherer indicated that the Ames Public Library day count is "through the roof" when compared to cities of a similar size.

Mr. Davis asked for clarification regarding whether or not the shelving will be reused, since the shelving in the new building will be lower. Mr. Scherer explained that the frames can be reused, and Mr. Weeks added that additional shelving will likely be brought in for the more popular materials. He also explained that they need to have wider aisles, because they are currently at the absolute minimum ADA standard, which will likely increase. He reiterated that they will migrate as much shelving as they can.

Mr. Goodman commented that the price tag is big, but they have never bought a library before and so it is hard to gain a perspective. He pointed out that the Aquatic Center is utilized a quarter of the year and cost \$8 million, and compared that to a library that will be used four quarters of the year at \$32 million. He said that it is inevitably going to be a high price tag, and it will be up to the voters to decide whether they can accept that or not.

EXPLANATION OF FUND-RAISING FEASIBILITY STUDY:

Russ Hodge, Principal of The Hodge Group, introduced himself and his associate Kay Runge. He explained that they have a unique proposed function in the project as it relates to financing.

Mr. Hodge said that he views financing as a three-legged stool, and briefly reviewed each "leg". The

first is philanthropic gifts, and he explained that they want to determine, through accurate methodology, a potential philanthropic income for the project. He stated that the second leg was bonding/levying/government. He further explained that “government” meant the City’s ability to pass a levy, and also the availability of Federal and State money. Mr. Hodge indicated that the third and most challenging leg is financing, which is essentially putting legs one and two together and making the funds available to meet the demands of construction draws.

According to Mr. Hodge, the two important things needed for their work to proceed are a site and a price tag, and he deduced that both of those had been generally decided.

Mr. Hodge described the details about how they would gather data for the different “legs.” For the philanthropic piece, he said that they will have in-depth, one-on-one meetings with 45 to 60 carefully selected individuals that make, give, and influence the philanthropic process, as a way to accurately predict how much philanthropic income is available. Mr. Hodge noted that it is an intimate, confidential process. For the government portion, he explained that a phone survey of approximately 400 randomly selected likely voters would be conducted, which would give a general idea for what the tolerance is for a levy or bond issue. They would also examine whether there is money available at the State and Federal level, and how those monies could be put together in a reasonable funding stream. Mr. Hodge said that it is then a question of how to merge private sector funding and public sector funding. He said that it is important to have the right conversations with the right people, as well as ask the right questions. He indicated that the overall process takes about four to five months, with progress reports to the Library Board intermittently. Mr. Hodge stressed that their goal is to give sufficient managerial information to the Library Board and City Council that they may make an informed decision, along with the citizens, that is financially sound.

Regarding a library project in Fargo, Council Member Orazem asked how much of the total cost was philanthropic, and Mr. Hodge replied that it was approximately \$6.5 million. He also indicated that a recent library project in downtown Des Moines was funded by approximately \$12 million in government money and \$12 million in philanthropic gifts.

City Manager Steve Schainker asked if there was a mechanism to up front the cost of the philanthropic pledges. Mr. Hodge said that there were several mechanisms available, which are all done totally outside of the City. Ms. Runge later added that, typically in library campaigns, almost 100 percent of people pay their pledges, with a less than one percent default rate.

Mr. Schainker asked if operating costs and capital costs are shared with people during the surveys. Mr. Hodge replied that it is shared in both the conversations with private donors and in the public phone survey.

Regarding the philanthropic study, Mr. Orazem questioned whether or not the information gathered was confidential. Mr. Hodge explained that the data gets turned over, but personal information remains confidential.

Council Member Davis asked how The Hodge Group was chosen over other groups that are in this business. Mr. Weeks explained that they sent out a Request For Proposal to likely firms that would

respond, and of those, they received over a half dozen responses. An evaluation committee consisting of Library Trustees and the Library Foundation interviewed the finalists, and the Library Board then voted on the recommendation. He explained that since the dollar amount of the study was over \$50,000, they had to seek Council approval for the contract; however, that Council decision has been delayed until a site can be agreed upon. Mr. Weeks noted that several of the responding firms had no experience with libraries, and that references played a huge role in the selection process as well. He explained that there are only about 30 firms in the U.S. that do feasibility studies on this scale.

Sue Ravenscroft expressed disdain for the idea that the feasibility study would be paid for by local option tax or maintenance funds. She said that there is private grant money that could be used to pay for the study. Mr. Weeks pointed out that the maintenance funds were for projects that they would not undertake given the prospect of a new library.

Mr. Goodman asked if a parking ramp that would be aesthetically compatible with the neighborhood could be achieved with the \$2.5 million budget. Mr. Scherer stated that there were four critical pieces to the parking ramp: that the height would not exceed the church, the landscaping would match the historical corridor, the intersection of Douglas and Sixth would be improved, and the ramp would be low cut-off lighting which would not interfere with residential quality of the neighborhood.

Anne Kinzel asked if the process by which The Hodge Group was chosen is the normal process by which the City goes out to bid if local option sales tax money is being used. Mr. Schainker replied that it is, regardless of the source of funding.

COMMENTS: There were no comments by the Council.

ADJOURNMENT: The Special Meeting adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Diane R. Voss, City Clerk

Ann H. Campbell, Mayor

Emily Burton, Recording Secretary