

Town of Middlebury
Ilsley Library Renovation Expansion Working Group
Minutes of Meeting
October 14, 2021

Present:

Selectboard members Dan Brown and Lindsey Fuentes-George
Ilsley Library Board of Directors Joe McVeigh and Amy Mincher
Library Director Dana Hart
Town Staff Working Group Liaison Judith Harris

The first meeting of the Ilsley Library Renovation Expansion Working Group was called to order at 1:00 p.m.. Joe McVeigh said if it was alright with the others, he would act as Chair for now. The agenda was adopted and everyone introduced themselves.

McVeigh noted that no one on this working group had been involved in the first work done on the expansion and renovation of the Library, so this would be a fresh start. He said this working group would review the work of the previous building committee, and he handed out a draft charge for this group. He said it was important to understand what was, and wasn't, the work of this group, so asked them to look at it and see what they thought.

Brown said if you look at the history of everything that has occurred so far, nowhere does it say we throw out the old design and start again. He said in 2020 the Trustees voted in favor of alternatives to the plans presented, but it never says why that occurred. He said the Selectboard had also approved funds to begin the fundraising process, so he wondered when did the existing plan for the expansion and renovation die.

Hart said shortly after the meeting where the Selectboard approved this, the Library Director Kevin Unrath, left the Library. She said there was also pushback from community members about the cost of the project. She said when she was hired to replace Unrath, the Directors wanted her to begin on the fundraising process right away. She said when she met with the fundraising consultant, she (Christine Graham) advised it was not a good time to do a fundraising feasibility study because the public sentiment was pretty negative against the current plan, so Christine advised to get out into the community and figure out what they think of the plan in greater detail. Hart said she and the consultant met with public groups and found out people wanted to see a renovation, but they really felt the proposed plan was way too expensive. She said the consultant said if the public has serious concerns, then the committee had to look at a way it could be done for less money, and that is when the Trustees talked about looking at other design options.

McVeigh said if you look closely at the minutes when the Selectboard approved the design, Chairman Carpenter made it very clear they were not approving the cost of the project. He said the design as proposed required eliminating the two additions on the building now, and he said people thought there was no reason to remove those perfectly good structures, so that aspect of the plan was hard for people to accept. He said the Library Board met with the Town of Shelburne Library Board Chair whose town has a brand new library addition/renovation project that cost around \$6 or 7 million. He said at the time the original design was proposed, the previous Ilsley Library Board was under the impression they could fund raise millions. The Shelburne Library Board's fundraising consultant estimated they could raise around \$500,000, and that is just what they were able to raise and that was with a very generous

49 gift. He said the original plan for Ilsley Library solved all the problems with the building, at a cost of \$9.6
50 million, but the Library Board member who chaired that committee, felt very strongly this was the only
51 way it could be done, but the Trustees decided to look at alternatives and to prioritize which items to
52 address. Hart said it was decided that this process should not be done in isolation and that's when this
53 working group was created.

54
55 They began to review the draft charge for the Working Group. McVeigh asked Harris what her thoughts
56 were on the draft charge. Harris said she thought Item C on the refinement to the draft charge to the
57 Design Team will say what changes we want without specifically referencing it in the report to the
58 Selectboard. She said she has questions about master planning and phasing possibilities, as well as
59 different ways to structure financing and the alignment with the Downtown Master Plan, but said they
60 wanted to avoid taking on the work of the Design Team rather than provide guidance, but if they don't
61 convey to them what's important, then we could be missing an opportunity. She said the Selectboard
62 has been dealing with the alignment of the Downtown Master Plan as it related to the Economic
63 Development Initiative (EDI) project and connections to the other part of downtown, so it could be an
64 opportunity to rethink the whole thing. She said if you want to look at it globally, you might ask what is
65 the best use for a particular site and if you could do anything you want, where would you want to locate
66 the library. She said the overall question is what is this Working Group doing as a precursor to the
67 Design Team.

68
69 Mincher said the Trustees discussed if the project cost should be included or not. McVeigh said do we
70 look at the priorities or do we look at the highest and best use, or what would a library of the future look
71 like and would it be located where it is or a new location. He said they needed to look at why the
72 previous committee chose to stay on the current site.

73
74 Fuentes-George asked how the Shelburne library renovations and expansion compared to the original
75 plans for our library. Hart said she believed the square footage was around the same, but their historic
76 building did not present the challenges that ours does. Hart said it really is a chicken-and-egg situation
77 and it's hard not to get into cost, and everyone knows that the costs have only gone up in the past 2
78 years, so we might be in a situation that it will cost us \$10 million to do less than what the original plan
79 proposed. She said she's talked to architects who said to provide them with a number we want to
80 spend and they'll show us what they can design for that money, but she said how do you decide on a
81 number. She said the money is what she keeps coming back to and doesn't know at what point it needs
82 to be inserted into the conversation. She said while she doesn't want to cast doubt on the work done
83 previously, she said she thinks they may have to ask some questions, like does the 1980's addition really
84 need to be torn down, because maybe if that can be renovated it would give more flexibility in the price
85 tag. She said maybe they need to provide the Design Team with questions to ask about the previous
86 design. Harris said the public will ask those questions again, so they want to be able to answer them.

87
88 McVeigh asked if they felt the Charge was sufficient for their work. Hart said the only question she had
89 was for Item A, regarding the summary of work done by the previous committee, since there is so much
90 information available it would be helpful to have some guidance on the level of detail they need to
91 summarize.

92
93 McVeigh said you have to wonder who will use this report, and while initially it's for the Selectboard, it
94 might be the nucleolus for the new Design Team, so we might want to look into details more deeply, but
95 stop short of the work of the Design Team. Hart wanted the line "How the best practices in library

96 design have evolved” struck from Item B regarding the summary of changes since the previous design
97 plan, but other than that, the Committee agreed the Charge was acceptable.

98
99 Hart said she had sent out a link to the Library’s website that has the repository of previous information
100 and reports, and McVeigh gave a summary of the information available in digital files that were
101 available. McVeigh also suggested they walk through the library and see the issues and they could
102 interview some members of the previous committee. Hart said she didn’t think it was necessary to
103 review the process the previous committee went through in too much detail; the focus should be on
104 their findings.

105
106 McVeigh asked if anyone knew what the Selectboard was looking for in the report. Brown said he didn’t
107 know and Fuentes-George said she thought a concise and clear option that everyone could agree on.
108 There was discussion on the material available, and the consensus seemed to be that there was no need
109 to look at it in great detail. McVeigh said he’s trying to organize the material to make it easier for the
110 group to look at and Hart would add it to the Working Group page on the Library website.

111
112 Brown said he thought what this group needed to do was to look at the work done previously and put
113 that in a summary and then to draft a charge for the Design Group. He didn’t think they needed to delve
114 deeply into the previous information, such as minutes. He thought as they proceed forward they could
115 look at one or two items each time they meet and address how that would go into the summary. He
116 thought the agendas for their meeting should be more specific of what they’d be looking at each
117 meeting. Fuentes-George agreed and thought the report could be written as they go along.

118
119 Harris felt that Items A & B in their draft charge is out of her realm of work and cautioned that they’re
120 historic and outside the purview of what we’re about to launch into. She doesn’t think they’re as
121 applicable as C & D, and they’ll have to think about the process and put it down in detail, since that’s
122 critical to how the whole thing flows, and thinks that will take quite a bit of effort.

123
124 Harris asked about the removal of the earlier library additions. Hart said she understood that the reason
125 they had to come down was so they could shore up the foundation of the original 1928 building, yet
126 she’d been talking to the architect later who said it might be interesting to see about keeping the
127 addition. Mincher thought the removal also had to do with the 2nd floor trusses and the support as well,
128 so the building committee had thought the only thing to do was to remove the addition. McVeigh said
129 the original committee might have come to conclusions that a new committee might not.

130
131 There was discussion on the schedule of meetings, and they agreed to meet again on October 28th and
132 then weekly until Thanksgiving. They also discussed how to keep the Selectboard apprised of their
133 work, and decided the minutes of the meeting would suffice for now.

134
135 Harris said that there are costs for maintaining a building that has to be figured into the costs as well.
136 Hart said they had just replaced the lobby lights with new LED fixtures, but she said there are lights in
137 other areas that need replacing and the elevator is being nursed along in hopes it will last until a new
138 building or renovation, and the sprinkler system needs to be replaced and the alarm system needs to be
139 replaced this year, plus there are mold issues, so there are safety issues that need to be addressed.

140
141 Mincher said this time around they need to be very conscious of having an open process, because the
142 last time there were comments from the public that the process wasn’t open enough. Fuentes-George
143 said it would be helpful to have the cost of what it would take to fix all the safety and maintenance

144 issues that need to be done to the existing building as a comparison to the cost to renovate or expand.
145 Brown said they'll also have to get creative in financing the project, because it can't all be on property
146 tax payers. McVeigh said maybe there will need to be a funding committee that works with the design
147 committee. Fuentes-George said maybe a community liaison similar to Jim Gish would be helpful.

148
149 McVeigh and Hart agreed to take on Items a. (Summary of the work done by the 2014-2017 Library
150 Building Committee – issues and challenges) and b. Summary of changes since the previous design plan
151 was developed – Pandemic affects, what was learned, what should be done differently this time) for the
152 Working Group and come back next time with suggested language for Item A at the October 28th
153 meeting. It is hoped that the group will also have time on October 28th to begin addressing Item C.
154 Recommended changes or refinements to the Draft Charge to the Design Team.

155
156 The Working Group also does not feel their work should take 5 months. It would be our goal to trim this
157 as much as possible to 2 months plus as a target.

158
159 The meeting adjourned at 1:30 p.m. The next meeting will be on Thursday, October 28, 2021.

160
161 Respectfully submitted,
162 Beth Dow

163
164