

Town of Middlebury  
Ilsley Library Renovation Expansion Working Group  
Minutes of Meeting  
November 18, 2021

Present:

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

Absent: Selectboard member Dan Brown

Also Present: Director of Middlebury Planning and Zoning Jennifer Murray

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m. by Joe McVeigh and the agenda was adopted as presented.

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted as presented.

Approval of 11/11/21 Minutes

The minutes were approved as presented.

Update on Funding

McVeigh said there is currently \$24,000 in the Capital Budget originally designated for a funding feasibility study in 2017, however it is available to use for the design process. He said an additional \$15,000 has been appropriated for the FY23 Capital Budget, for a total of \$39,000 to spend between now and June 30, 2023. He said it now seems we'll also need to be talking to others who will be part of the design team, so he's wondering if \$39,000 will be enough. He said in discussions with Town Manager Kathleen Ramsay, she indicated when an estimate of what was needed is established, it could be taken to the Infrastructure Committee for discussion on the possibility of increasing the funding request, with the understanding things are tight.

Harris said she had been looking back at the design costs for the Town Office project to get some sense of what the costs might be, however that project was a design/build project, so the costs for design might not correspond with this project. She said when you look at the Downtown Master Plan, it makes you question if the library planning should be on conceptual schemes in the beginning, since some of the suggestions in the Downtown Master Plan involved the library. She said there is still some research to be done and she will work on arriving at design cost budget figures for various approaches.

Town Planner Jennifer Murray

McVeigh asked Murray how she thought of the Master Plan in terms of future development. Murray said there are recommendations in the Plan that hopefully will be implemented over time. She said it doesn't mean people have to do what is in the Master Plan, but it's meant to be a guidebook. She said there had been really good public participation that went into it and it's been endorsed by the Selectboard, so to stray too far from

49 the Master Plan would be a bit of a faux pas. McVeigh asked if there's a recommendation in the Master Plan, it  
50 doesn't necessarily mean it will happen, and Murray said not necessarily.

51  
52 Murray said when she came here things downtown seemed to be happening in really different directions, so in  
53 that case the downtown can be chaotic. She said if you look at a product that had a great deal of thought in the  
54 beginning, you'll end up with a really quality product in the end. She said to have an overall master plan that  
55 everyone participated in, then the recommendations made will have been vetted and there will be increased  
56 equity in the final product. Murray said the Master Plan is meant to be a living document that is looked at every  
57 few years and updated. She said it isn't meant to be weaponized, which is what happened with the Town  
58 Offices where everyone insisted it had to built downtown because the Town Plan said so, it's meant to be  
59 conceptual and isn't meant to be limiting.

60  
61 McVeigh asked Murray for her ideas on how the Library expansion/renovation fits into the Downtown Master  
62 Plan, such as should the expansion happen with the existing building or should it be in a different location, and  
63 if so, where might that be. He also wondered if it should be included within other development in the  
64 downtown. Murray said she's not the type of Planner who will give that answer, but she thinks all those options  
65 should be on the table. She said while having the library downtown is great, there might be some value in  
66 moving a piece of the library outside of the downtown.

67  
68 Harris asked of all the concepts in the Master Plan, has there been any progress on any of them so we have an  
69 idea of the framework we're dealing with. She said it mentions forming partnerships for the Bakery Lane area,  
70 and are there any discussions happening at the moment or any plans being made? Murray said the  
71 recommendations in the Master Plan were developed after discussions with the developer who had been  
72 involved in the earlier Economic Development Initiative (EDI) with the Town of Middlebury for the Bakery Lane  
73 area. She described how the Master Plan consultants went through a detailed process with the developers to  
74 see where things might have gone differently with the project. She said the Town had wanted to maintain  
75 control throughout the duration of the project by having a public/private partnership so there could be some  
76 control over what types of entities went into the space. She said all the recommendations in this Master Plan  
77 are based on that model, but she isn't sure that a public/private partnership is how this property will be  
78 developed in the future.

79  
80 McVeigh said at the recent Selectboard retreats, the Board had discussed whether or not to spend \$95,000 on  
81 an economic development specialist to work on this project. Murray said the \$95,000 was not for a consultant,  
82 but for a feasibility study of what the community wants and can tolerate on that site, and then look at it  
83 economically from the developers' point-of-view as well, and then come up with a plan of what is wanted there,  
84 but no decision has been made. Fuentes-George said there was a feeling on the Board that this is not the time  
85 to move forward with this project, but it is certainly a project that a number of people on the Board are very  
86 excited about.

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88 Murray said she'd offered three options to the Selectboard at their retreat: to continue to utilize the space as a  
89 parking lot as it is now and wait and see what comes along in the future; or, sell it to a developer, and there was  
90 one at the time who was interested in the site for development of only residences, and many feel it should be  
91 developed as mixed uses, however that is difficult to develop as speculation space for retail without up-front  
92 tenants. She said the 3<sup>rd</sup> option was to go ahead with the feasibility study. She said while it would be easier to  
93 simply sell it to a developer, there would be a lot of the community who wouldn't be happy with it since there is  
94 a lot of sentiment about the site.

95

96 Mincher said when the Library Trustees had discussion about the EDI site there had been confusion as how this  
97 intersects with the Library footprint or the upper parking lot. McVeigh said the Library has distinct property  
98 lines, but since the Town of Middlebury owns the Library and the property around the Library, he wondered if  
99 there was flexibility in the footprint available for the Library to develop on.

100

101 Murray went over the Master Plan drawing of the conceptual layout for development in the Bakery Lane area  
102 and the upper parking lot behind the Library, and there were questions and discussion about the design.  
103

104 Hart wondered if it would be worth the time to think about how the Library might interact with a development  
105 in Bakery Lane or should we not focus on it since it's out of our hands. Fuentes-George said at this point it's just  
106 a concept and we're nowhere near making it happen and the Library is an existing entity in the downtown, and if  
107 we try to bring this concept and merge them, there's the possibility you may end up with a product you're not  
108 happy with. Mincher said she'd rather move ahead with the Library project and then have the EDI project  
109 conform to what the Library has planned. Murray said the beauty of the Master Plan is it helps designers think  
110 of designs in relation to other potential development recommended in the Plan.  
111

112 Hart said one thought with the Library expansion is to try to include other multiple goals for the downtown area,  
113 so while things are out on the table, should the Library be going to other possible partners, such as Community  
114 College of Vermont or Middlebury College to see if they would like space in the plans. Harris said that makes the  
115 most sense. Murray said once an architect begins the design, they may preclude some other options, so  
116 thinking about some other things you want to include and how the Library may want to interact with future  
117 development, such as the parking garage, is important. Murray said the other thing from the Master Plan the  
118 Library might benefit from are the "Guiding Principles" listed to consider when designing projects.  
119

120 Hart asked Murray for her opinion on how the Library project went the last time, since this time they're hoping  
121 to do things differently, and since the community engagement portion of the Downtown Master Plan was so  
122 impressive and she felt the people really felt they were heard. Murray suggested using summer interns to do  
123 surveys. She explained all the surveys and inventories these interns did prior to work beginning on the Master  
124 Plan. She said the consultant came on-board and had a major Planapalooza event that combined the public  
125 meeting with a design studio included so the public actually had something to respond to. She said including the  
126 public before the planning process begins instead of preparing the Plan and then presenting it to them for  
127 comments works the best. She said there was the early meeting, a mid-meeting, and then a final meeting so  
128 people were involved throughout the process. Murray said she also spent almost 3 years looking at what other  
129 towns around the State had done and other Master Plans, going to conferences, and she had a good scope of  
130 work before she put out her Request for Proposals (RFP).  
131

132 Murray said while the process to do the Master Plan might not match what the Library needs to do, she said  
133 they might reference the decision on where to locate the Railroad Platform, where four different locations with  
134 pros and cons for each were created and then a community survey was done to narrow down where the  
135 location should be.  
136

137 Mincher said with the first design, the architectural design of the building seemed to be an issue, but she didn't  
138 see anything about building style in the Master Plan. Murray said there are visual preference surveys that can  
139 be used, and thought that would be an engaging activity to have at one of their community meetings. Harris  
140 said it's really important to find out what services people want that don't exist now that they can get excited  
141 about. McVeigh said the next design advisory team needs to become steeped in current trends and tie that into  
142 the public engagement. Fuentes-George said since the cost of this building is going to be quite high, the more  
143 people are excited about it the easier it will be to raise funds and the more people will be able to approve a

144 higher bond. Murray said as you ask the community questions about what's important to them you'll begin to  
145 see a theme in the responses, and then those themes can be given to the design team.

146  
147 McVeigh wonders about the decision process when people want very different things, such as some want to  
148 retain the original historic building and others want new and bright open space. Murray said you have to be  
149 careful how you facilitate those discussions, so having a trained facilitator is often helpful. Fuentes-George said  
150 communication and the way it's conveyed to the public that their concerns and wants were heard, but this is  
151 why things were done this way, is important.

152  
153 Harris said one job of the architects is to take what's happening inside a structure and express it outside and if  
154 its multiple things going on inside, it makes you think that it might be designed as more of a "campus". She said  
155 she keeps thinking that all these things might not fit in one box.

156  
157 Finalize Name for "Non-professional Design Team"

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159 McVeigh reminded them that the work of this working group is not to do all the work, but to come up with the  
160 charge for the next group. He said one thing to help would be to have a clear name for the next group. Hart  
161 said the two discussed at the last meeting was "The Centennial Renovation and Expansion Team" and then  
162 simply "The Renovation and Expansion Team".

163  
164 McVeigh said the Trustees envision there would be a design team, a funding team and a community  
165 engagement team, but he said they haven't resolved how this process would be organized. Hart said the body  
166 this working group would be writing the charge for is the "Renovation and Expansion Team". Following some  
167 discussion on various names, the item was tabled again and members of the team will think about it and ask  
168 others and come back to the next meeting with some ideas. There is also still uncertainty on who these groups  
169 will report to and if they'll be under one umbrella.

170  
171 Questions for the Meeting with earlier Library Building Committee

172  
173 There was discussion on what questions they might ask the former Library Building Committee members who  
174 will be at the next meeting, such as what they have done differently. They also discussed that a presentation  
175 from the former architects wasn't what they wanted, but just time to discuss the process and to get some  
176 answers to questions about the first design.

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178 The next meeting of the Ilsley Renovation and Expansion Working Group will be Thursday, December 2, 2021 at  
179 2:00.

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181 The meeting adjourned at 1:33 p.m.  
182 Respectfully submitted,  
183 Beth Dow

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