

Southeast Library – Capitol Hill Village Community Meeting Jan.28, 2019

In Attendance:

Over 50 members of the Capitol Hill Village, ANC6B Commissioners – Steve Holtzman, Kristen Oldenburg and Gerald Sroufe, Neil Gregory (President of Friends of Southeast Library) and DC Public Library staff.

Speaker - Richard Reyes-Gavilan – Executive Director, DC Public Library

Opening Introduction and Slideshow:

Richard Reyes-Gavilan (RR-G) welcomed everyone, thanked Neil Gregory for organizing the meeting and then introduced Library staff.

The slide show covered how general library design is changing, examples of modernized DC library buildings, how the RFP process unfolds, how the team is chosen and the community engagement process.

Questions and Comments:

1. *(R-RG mentioned taking some of the community leaders on a tour of other DC Library projects and the opportunity the tour provides for library leadership and community leadership to discuss what has worked well in earlier projects and what hasn't worked so well.)*

Doesn't the tour take place before the RFP gets written?

The RFP is a long process. The tour and the RFP can happen at the same time.

This is really critical, most of us here know what we want and the specifications we want have to go into the RFP...

Correct but we don't visit the libraries with the architect.

I know but in drafting the RFP, won't the community be involved with that? It's like the RFP is coming out of nowhere.

We have an RFP, but the RFP does not dictate, in any great specificity, the actual programming of the library. The programming is developed once the architect is 'on board.' We don't want to tell any architect or builder, "This is the program we need." The programming has to be a community driven process working with the architect. What we look for with the RFP is to find the best team to work with the library and the community. Once we have the team, we will begin the development of the library building program.

2. **I am going to try and translate because I found what I just heard you say about the process a little disturbing. First of all, you just told us that the space is going to be limited to the 'foot print' (the size of the building) that's here? You're not going to go up. You're not going to go down. Clearly you can't go side-to-side.**

Correct.

Secondly, it sounds like the RFP process is based on dollars and cents. That what you're really looking for is money and professional experience. After you've selected the 'business' you're then going to come back and talk about the special criteria that the library board and the people in our community have for our local library. That seems a little backwards to me. I would like to know that the group you select can accommodate our community's quirks and desires and our list of what our needs are. I'm not sure that I trust you to figure out what I want. I don't want community involvement to be the last thing in the process, which is what this sounds like.

Community involvement is the first thing in the process. There is community involvement in the selection of the design/build team. Community involvement is crucial to us. Again, not to belabor it, but this is our 23rd project.

I know you've done a lot of them. I admire some of them and I don't like a lot of them at all. So, your reputation is just fine. I'm talking about my library, that's all I really care about.

That's exactly why, once we've chosen a team, before they draw a single line for a wall, they are responsible for engaging the community on the program development.

- 3. I feel like all I'm hearing is, "my library, my library." Each one of us has a different set of priorities, five people in this room will have five different ideas for the library, my concern in this community is that we never get anywhere. I want this library completed in my lifetime. Let's just do something and get it done ... anything will be better than what we have right now.**

I don't want to be dismissive of the amount of community engagement this project will undertake. This, what I'm doing right now in meeting with you, is long before what our community engagement team will do. They will go around the neighborhood, they'll meet with folks, collect their thoughts and ideas. Once we've brought the architect and builder on board we will have even more time to collect your thoughts and ideas. So, again, what we want to do is bring on the best team based on their experience. That's when we really start the planning your library.

- 4. I'm being really persistent and I feel like I'm being a pain, but once again, I'm going to stick to my guns. I want to know why you are not doing a survey first to find out what people want in our community library. I still do not understand why community input is the last thing and not the first thing. Why doesn't (community input) impact the firm that you select?**

The RFP brings the team on, it doesn't suggest how big this library will be, it doesn't suggest any of the programming for this project. We pride ourselves on making this a community driven process. Our RFPs – you can look at them online – are a boiler plate document for bringing somebody on. Beyond that, there are no decisions made about this new library prior to all the community outreach that will be taking place. Clearly, when you have a community library like Southeast that attracts about 200,000 visitors a year there are going to be many people we will talk with and that will mean many competing interests. "I want a library for the future." "I want a library that looks just like this one." All of the ideas will be absorbed and we will design a library that may not

please everyone but everyone will see something in the new library that speaks to their desire for a renovated library.

5. Will it help to have the architect/build team in place before proceeding with the in-depth surveys and community engagement process?

The RFP is about bringing in a team that has done a lot of historic renovations and library work. Again, the team will be chosen with help from the community.

6. Can I suggest, as a retired architect, that one of the jobs of the architect team will be in helping us determine the program?

That is correct.

7. But you said you wanted to find a firm that can do what we need.

We want to find a firm that is good at libraries – that’s the big one. We also want one that knows how to do historic renovations. Again, the community will be part of that decision.

8. I worked on a project here in the community and one of the first things we did was send out a questionnaire asking, “How do you expect to use this?” and we had very few problems. Why don’t you send out a questionnaire?

That is exactly what we will do. We ask in great detail, in meetings, surveys and focus groups -- how do you expect to use this space?

9. I understand you use a boiler-plate RFP, so how do you craft your language to attract the right kind of firm?

In the RFP we address the challenges that will be inherent in modernizing and possibly expanding this building. For instance, this is a 100-year old building in an historic district – all of the challenges are put into the RFP to help us with determining, at the highest level, which firms should be on the short list for this type of project. The RFP is not so boiler-plate that it has no bearing on the specificities of this particular project. A lot of the language about the specifics of this project will be in the RFP. We will not put in the RFP details about how the building will be used - for instance “X” amount of space for seniors, “X” amount of space for the children’s section. All of that stuff will happen through the development of the program.

10. The link with the plaza will also be part of this at some point?

The link with the plaza will be spoken about, I think the plaza is a good point that you raise. The team will not be responsible for building anything on the plaza but with any project that has an adjacency issue, we always elevate that to make sure it is on the design team’s radar. Clearly there’ll be some communication between the team working on the plaza and the team working on the library.

11. **So with the RFP, when you're listing the challenges, the challenges will attract the kind of team that is creative and loves working with buildings with these sorts of challenges, they will know how to work on this sort of project?**

That's correct, absolutely, I couldn't agree with you more.

12. **Was there money appropriated for a tunnel to run underneath the roadway? I heard that there was.**

There is not money specifically designated for a tunnel.

13. **There were plans done a few years ago that included underground space for the library.**

Amy Weinstein was commissioned by a private group to do a study and her design had underground space.

Well, I don't want to continue talking about that old design. I want to move on. Our concern is that you're telling us we're part of the procedure and we feel we are not represented in the procedure. You are saying to us, "that even though your name isn't written on this outline we will not be doing anything without hearing from you." What you're saying is not giving us confidence or a place to submit our ideas. It feels like you're giving us a one-way street.

This is really an opportunity for me to talk about the stages of a Library project, we have not begun the community engagement process. Returning to the issue of the subterranean connection to the Eastern Market Metro Plaza – there was a design from 2014 with a proposed expansion that goes beneath 7th Street. It's a design that I don't think we will be pursuing by virtue that it is probably beyond the scope of what the Library can do. That said, we will be trying to expand this library – I don't know what is possible. I don't categorically dismiss anything.

14. **Will a review of the design alternatives be part of your public engagement process?**

After the building program is developed, the architects will typically come back with a couple of different "directions" and those we present as part of the engagement process.

Now, let's get back to the slides ... we're pretty much in the Q & A part. There is a website for people to stay informed about the project. Of course, the branch manager, Julia Strusienski is a source of information on the project.

15. **Can we see examples of the RFP that you use so we can see what it will look like?**

Yes, absolutely. I believe the RFPs are on the Library's contracts and procurement site.

16. **(Neil Gregory, President of the Friends of Southeast Library) This meeting was organized to find out what seniors want in a library. We will reach out to MOTH (Mothers on the Hill) to find out what young families want. Any group has the opportunity to be meet with Rich and his people.**

17. **Do the librarians have any voice in this project? I want to know what the librarians who work here want. And I don't believe the homeless people have representation but they are a very large group of users here.**

I agree. We will be engaging with both groups, as we have done in all of our previous projects.

I want that on the record.

Noted, it is on the record.

18. **Can you talk about interim plans and how we will be able to continue getting books?**

We're not sure yet, this is still very early in the process. Interim services can be defined by anything from a store front to a free-standing structure. Figuring out if there are community organizations we can work with – organizations such as the Hill Center -- where we might have some sort of presence where people can pick-up reserved books. It's too early to lease a space – we are a couple of years out – but working with community members, organizations, elected officials we hope to find something cost effective, convenient, that will get through from closure to the opening. We are committed to providing some kind of interim services but I can't tell what that will look like at this point.

19. **Is this the smallest 'footprint' library in the DC system?**

It's one of the smallest.

And considering the 23 million (appropriated for the renovation) has anyone compared the cost per square foot of staying here versus another location? For instance, Cesar Chavez (Charter School) is leaving their historic building (709 12th St. SE) and it's 8 times bigger than this building. The cost of renovating that building is way less than renovating this building. So, are you looking around? Does DCPL want to stay in this building or do they want to sell it and move into a larger facility to the east and take with it all the (equity) because DC Library has owned this building from when it wasn't worth very much to the "Trader Joes" era.

That is bold thinking. We have not contemplated leaving this facility. This is a facility that the library owns. Unless there were a groundswell of support to move to another location, the library is going to move forward with renovating this space.

So, there's never going to be much space for books. The Northeast Library has a wonderful collection of books. We have a few bookshelves.

There are ways to get more bookshelves in if it's done properly, I'm not too worried about that. If that's the priority, then that's what we talk with our architect about. If we want tens of thousands of books, then what won't be there? What do we give up if we want a room that can hold 200 people for a meeting? Those conversations about what is most important to the community – the programming conversations – will be part of the future engagement. Every library project is a project about tradeoffs. Still, your point is well taken, we need a bigger library.

I have another thought, the building directly across the street is not historic, it's the infill building that has the shoe repair guy. A tunnel to that building wouldn't have the same issues as a tunnel by the metro station.

Clearly the cost per square foot would make this an expensive project.

20. **One of the reasons we're here today is to talk about what we want and what I want is community meeting space. Yoga class to have Village voice's presentations and discussion groups – that is a priority for me.**
21. **I think we are in a little town center of Capitol Hill Town – and I think that planning for where things happen, meetings for 200 people – I think that somebody, maybe not the library, needs to look at the bigger picture. We have the Hill Center. Community money went into that. We have the North Hall of the Eastern Market. So there is a bigger context for where this library is and what kinds of needs it serves – maybe it doesn't address all of the needs and desires.**
22. **The information is extremely important – the idea is to get everybody's input.**
23. **What you're talking about – my concern is the library is very small for all the people who use it.**

Your point is well taken. We need a bigger library.

24. **Well, how are you going to get us a bigger library?**

I don't know – it's a challenging footprint.

It doesn't seem sensible to move ahead unless you know it can be expanded.

25. **The architect is going to come – like when we've redone our houses. And like with our houses, where we have collected all sorts of photos and ideas, we will share with the architect everything we want. The architect will look at our list and explain what will and what won't work with this space. I would also like to say that while I appreciate the emphasis on the old people and the young people is important I would also like to think there'll be a place for teens. They have a need to feel comfortable.**
26. **Earlier in the conversation you indicated that you are closing the door on any other location.**
You know the plan right now is to modernize this specific building.
27. **Where do we go with the idea of looking at another location?**
Starting here is a good start.
28. **You never use the same firm twice?**

That's not true. We've used some of the firms more than once. Also, Archie just reminded me – we are currently developing a 10-year Facilities Master Plan and we will be using that plan to help plan our growth.

29. About 15 years ago this library was renovated?

Library Journal made that donation of about \$50,000 to do that work. It was really more of a cosmetic spruce up.