



Task Force Presents Final Library Report

April 17, 2024
by Ryan Bray



This rendering of a new Snow Library at 167 Main St. was presented to the select board April 10. Library advocates are seeking \$180,000 at the annual town meeting in May in support of a grant application that could help cover the cost of the building's construction. OUDENS ELLO ARCHITECTURE

ORLEANS – A final report regarding plans for a new Snow Library has been submitted to the select board. Now all eyes are on a potential state grant that could help finance a sizable portion of the project's funding.

An overview of the 260-page feasibility study given to the board April 10 by Matt Oudens of Oudens Ello Architecture in Boston shows a sleekly designed 24,000-square-foot library at the site of the current library at 167 Main St. A small one-story level would front Main Street, while an elongated two-story wing would occupy space in the village green.

Oudens was hired to help prepare a feasibility study alongside the Snow Library feasibility task force, which began its work exploring options for a new library in October. Over the last six months,

the task force looked at siting a new library at the current location and at property across the street from town hall at 139 Main St. The task force also prepared three design options that were presented during two public hearings.

Both sites are about two acres in size, but Oudens told the select board that a new library is more ideally situated in a walkable area downtown, whereas 139 Main St. is more “remote” and “car-centric.”

“We conclude that it is feasible to build a new public library on the existing site,” he said.

The design presented to the select board last week showed a building with two entrances, including one from Main Street and another from a proposed 60-space parking lot on the

west side of the building abutting Friends' Marketplace. Both entrances show small plaza areas leading into the building. Oudens said 60 spaces is the number recommended by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, through which the task force is applying for the construction grant.

A new library is projected to increase "net programming space" by 67 percent, Oudens said. That includes more than 4,700 square feet of space dedicated to community programming, an increase of 170 percent from what currently exists.

"That's really consistent with the way we see libraries being used today," Oudens told the select board.

Oudens said 70 percent of programming would be housed on the library's first floor. Separate from the library area is a first-floor community area that would be open to the public after library hours. That includes a large meeting room that could accommodate up to 116 people, a large program room, a "social seating area" and restrooms.

Oudens said the one-story wing would fit in with the "quaint" character of Main Street, which is populated largely by other single story shops and buildings. Meanwhile, he said the larger two-story wing, which includes a covered outdoor reading balcony, would mesh well with the village greenspace.

"So we think this really starts to contribute to the kind of vitality of Main Street that we think should exist," he said.

Select Board chair Michael Herman asked about the potential for solar to be included as part of the library design. Oudens said the roof could accommodate solar panels, adding that the goal is to design the library as a net zero facility.

But Oudens noted that the design presented to the select board is not set in stone, and that the town has options when it comes to preparing a final design. That could include a hybrid of the three designs that were prepared as part of the feasibility study, he said.

"What we propose in the book is really meant to demonstrate that something is feasible here," he said. "We looked at three options, and I think any one of them would be feasible. I think derivation of those three also, some combination of those elements" are possible.

The project is estimated to cost \$37.7 million, and the task force and Snow Library board of trustees are hoping that the state grant will cover some of the cost. The grant application will be filed with the state in May, and Oudens said the town should hear back about its application in the fall.

At the May 13 annual town meeting, an article will go before voters seeking \$150,000 for the project. The funding is needed as a show of the town's commitment to the project, which is required in order to successfully apply for the grant.

Steve Gass, who chairs the task force, said in past funding rounds, the MBLC grant has at times funded as much as 50 percent of a project's construction cost. But he said that with

inflation and other factors, he was reluctant to guess how much the town might net from the state if the grant is awarded.

“Unfortunately I’m hesitant to even say in a public meeting a percent it might rise to,” he said. If the grant funding is not awarded, another article would be prepared for a future town meeting seeking full funding for the project.

Once funding is in place, the project would move into an estimated year-long design phase, followed by approximately 18 months of construction, Oudens said.

With the annual town meeting less than a month away, Kevin Galligan of the select board urged the task force to make the case for the requested funding ahead of the spring session.

“This just gets us into the [funding] round,” he said. “That’s all we’re doing.”

Galligan also stressed that care needs to be taken with hazardous materials that currently exist in the library, noting the potential risks they could pose if and when the building is demolished. But he also expressed optimism about the project’s prospects going forward,

“We can do this,” he said. “I am firmly believing that with the quality of all the input that we are going to get this done. I really believe that.”

Email Ryan Bray at ryan@capecodchronicle.com