

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG
MINUTES
WORKSHOP MEETING OF MAY 18, 2006**

7:00 P.M.

MAYOR'S STATEMENT: Mayor Ellis called the meeting to order at 7:10 PM and made the following statement: Under the provisions of N.J.S.A.10:4-6 et seq., notice of the time and place of this meeting was given by way of special notice to the Courier News, Echoes Sentinel, Messenger-Gazette and Star Ledger, and posted at Borough Hall.

SALUTE TO THE FLAG, SILENT PRAYER, AND ROLL CALL

Black [A] Franklin [P] Mobus [P] Joren [P] Pote [P] Nehls [P]

Also present were Administrator/Clerk Lauren Fellin and Deputy Clerk Michelle DeRocco.

There were 30 people from the public present.

Introduction and Ground Rules

Mayor Ellis welcomed everyone and explained, for this special workshop meeting, ground rules have been set. He said there is an agenda and a set schedule for discussion and he hopes to keep to the framework. He thanked Councilman Pote, liaison to the Library, for organizing this workshop and expediting this process. Mayor Ellis explained that after the information and input is gathered from the two workshop meetings, it will be presented to the Council to review and make a decision. After that, a committee will be formed and their responsibility will be to implement the Council's recommendation.

Councilman Pote announced that this is the first of two scheduled workshop meetings. He explained that the Library Board made a presentation to the governing body on March 9th, and now is the time to hear from the residents. He said the goals of the Workshop Meetings will be to formally gather input and ideas from the public in regard to specific changes to the Library, to provide opportunity for the public to express their feelings as they relate to the Library, and to provide an opportunity for exchange between the public and the Mayor and Council in regard to the future of the Library.

Councilman Pote said all ideas are good ideas, and asked the public to be respectful of others, as well as the time. He asked that Watchung residents have the opportunity to speak first and asked that all comments stick to the subject.

DISCUSSION:

Councilman Pote said he will deviate from the agenda by beginning with:

Part 2: Inadequacies of Current Facility Review

Councilman Pote asked the question "why are we here?" and said "because our Library is not fulfilling the needs of the residents. The governing body wants to hear from the taxpayers, and asked for positive comments, as well as the constructive comments."

Barbara Quinn, High Tor Drive, said the Library is used as a resource to back up and provide what the school library cannot. She said the current facility is poorly organized, the rooms are broken up, and there is a lack of space. She said it is not conducive to good access.

Don Speeney, Stanie Glen Road, stated the Library's site location has ingress and egress concerns, and undesirable traffic.

Jack Schwartz, Ridge Road, said that the Library is not accessible for the handicapped, explaining that the front door is too heavy for a handicapped person to open, and there is not enough space for a wheelchair.

Lynda Goldschein, Sherwood Drive, said she feels the Library is in a great location and she has no problems with the egress, saying there are never any accidents when people are pulling out. She said if the driveway is changed to Valley Road, she feels it will be more dangerous. Mrs. Goldschein said she feels the videos and DVDs take up too much room and the Library is not a "Blockbuster". She said while she agrees the current Library needs expansion and needs to be handicapped accessible, she is against building a grandiose library in another location.

Rachel Pasternak, Birchwood Lane, said the current Library does not serve the purpose of a meeting place, either for children, moms, or seniors, and needs to be technologically up to date.

Dorothy Addario, Rock Avenue, said she is a frequent user of the Library and agrees it is inadequate for the handicapped, however, she said the taxpayers are currently feeling the burden of the school tax and she does not support the building of a new facility at the Ness property. She said while she supports story time for children, it is not a community center and does not need to be used for crafts. She said she also believes there is a lot of non-resident use. On behalf of the Historical Society, Mrs. Addario stated that they prefer to be housed elsewhere.

Karen Schmidl, Vail Lane, said Doug and the Staff do a wonderful job. She said while she is not looking for a Library the size of Warren's, she feels the major problem is a lack of "quiet space". She said a Library fosters the sense of "community" and is for the community.

Eleanor Niegisch, Tuttle Road, commented that the Library has a reciprocity plan with other Libraries and if need be, other Libraries are less than three miles away. She said that with the kids getting so much from the internet, is there a need for a Library? Doug Poswencyk, Librarian at the Watchung Library, replied that the internet information is not always accurate, as anyone can put anything on the internet.

Emi Havas, Valley Road, said the inadequacies of the Library are correctable. She said old books need to be cleaned out and food should not be eaten there. She said the problem with inadequate "quiet time" can be controlled with patrolling. She also stated there is a large stuffed animal in the center of the Library which, if removed, would free up space. Mrs. Havas said the Borough pays over \$600,000. per year to the County and it should have been better taken care of.

Ken Post, Washington Drive, said if the Library had more space, it could have more programs. He agrees that it is not too quiet, but is always friendly.

Tamara Benc, Lakeview Avenue, said a 21st Century Library is a media library. She said the fact that people are in the Library and there is a "buzz" is a positive thing. She feels the biggest inadequacy is the lack of space. She said she is proud of the town and does not want to go to another library. She said the Public Works building was updated. She said the Library is quaint as it is, and is a "jewel".

Mrs. Goldschein said the traffic coming in and out of the Library is a traffic enforcement issue.

Mrs. Havas asked if any statistics on how many people actually use the Library and how many are not from town? Jim Hecht, Director of the Somerset County Library, replied that the County has a counter on the door of the Somerset County Library, and studies show that for every 2 items circulating, one person came in.

Colleen Mehegan, Tuttle Road, said she heard there are over 3500 card holders which is significant.

Councilman Pote summed up the public's comments on the **Inadequacies of Current Facility** as follows:

- Space poorly organized
 - Not designed optimally
 - Hard to organize
- Lack /shortage of space
- Site location/egress
 - Inadequate
 - Traffic issues
- Facility not ADA compliant
 - Front door, space – not comfortable for handicapped
- Library or community center?
 - What is its use? Who supervises? How is it run?
 - Good things do happen at the Library
- Location OK – egress not an issue to some
 - Valley Road egress would be scary
- Library overtaken by videos
 - Take up too much room
 - Can get books online
- Are books still available online?
- Some expansion?
- What is the purpose?
 - Need to consider the needs of the town beyond Library use
- Tax implications - Taxes high already
- Leaving Library difficult – especially during rush hour
- Don't want to go elsewhere
- Doug and his staff do a great job
- More space needed – but size of Warren's not necessary
- No quiet space
 - Not conducive to homework or quiet reading
- Library needs to continue to foster aspects of a community center
- Other Libraries in area are available for use
- Inadequacies are correctable
 - Space may not be as bad
 - Library "voices" not being used
 - Food should not be allowed
 - Has been neglected
 - Animal in center needs to be removed
- More space equals more programs
- 21st Century Libraries are media centers

Part 3: Library Facility Requirements

Mr. Speeney said a media center is necessary to reflect the changing times.

Mrs. Addario wants to keep the friendly and helpful atmosphere.

Mrs. Benc said space is needed for children's activities, and separate sections for research and writing, additional tables and more staff.

Mrs. Goldschein said the library is being used as a senior center and has a room for the historical society. The Library is being stretched to the limits and would have more room for books if it was just used as a library.

Mayor Ellis asked for comments on a two story building vs one story.

Mrs. Niegisch said an elevator would be needed.

Mr. Poswencyk said more staff would be needed if there were more floors.

Mrs. Goldschein said media should be on one floor, and programs on another, as the kids should not be separated from their parents.

Mrs. Addario suggested off-site storage. She said she orders most of her books on line.

Ms. Schmidl suggested a new book section and said she likes the ability to browse the shelves.

Mr. Hecht said that statistically, one out of every six books borrowed is done online.

Mayor Ellis said the Committee would suggest the space allocation, and Mr. Hecht advised the current facility is approximately 3900 sq. ft. and Warren's Library is 21,000 sq. feet.

Mrs. Havas said the Warren Library is too big.

Gary Schmidt, Woodledge Road, commented that he and his family are frequent users and he is a proponent of inclusion, not to preclude the seniors as that can have a crossover effect.

Mrs. Addario said the Historical Commission has a problem with sharing due to the fact that over the years, valuable items have been taken.

Tony Addario said he finds it hard to believe the Seniors would be willing to share a room. He said a survey was done about 6 or 7 years ago and the overall response was to keep the Library as is. He said it is possible to double the space.

Mrs. Addario said she is not a supporter of a "community center" Library and does not like the idea of a free "Borders".

Mrs. Quinn said there is a difference between a community center with ping pong games vs a community center as a meeting place. She said she hopes all would embrace a new facility as it is a way for people to come together.

Councilman Pote summed up the public's comments on the **New Library Facility Requirements** as follows:

- The original Library Advisory Board recommendation was 12,000 Sq. feet and 40 parking spaces
 - Too big, 6,000 sq. feet maybe
 - Present facility is approximately 3600 – 3900 sq. feet
- Inclusion is good = crossover into other non-traditional library uses
 - Reading club
- Historic: Problem with others using area
 - It is not policed
 - If could, arrange differently
- Seniors: Would they be willing to share? Is it fair to them not to have a dedicated space?
 - Problem with sharing
- Old referendum referenced
- Community center vs atmosphere (community meeting area)
 - Not supportive
- How many people use the Library?
 - Data on library patron usage is erased by County – Frequency of patron use, and number of active cardholders would be good across all libraries
- Media center to keep with the changing times
- Keep friendly, helpful atmosphere
- What is the purpose/mission
 - In electronic age – will drive solution
- Space for activities
 - Separate areas
 - Separate space for homework, other activities – meeting rooms
- Seniors and Historical elsewhere
- "Balancing" of movies – pay for it?
- Second story possibility
- Media on one floor
- On site ? need more information
- Browsing ability still needed
- Need for direct access to books still important (not just via online)

Part 1: Current Alternatives Review

Alt #1: Maintain Existing Structure

Mrs. Goldschein commented that the current structure is not ADA compliant.

Andrew Calandriello, Hughes Lane, said the Library Advisory Board met with architects a few years ago and the estimated cost to upgrade the current facility was \$850,000 at that time. He said when you open old walls, you find other problems. He said the building was not originally constructed to be a Library and the current structure cannot withstand an elevator.

Mr. Post said the windows are now blocked with book shelves.

Mrs. Quinn said it is a house with books and videos, but it is still a house.

Christina Fiorenza, Valley Drive, said it would be incredibly difficult to make the current building ADA accessible, and to bring the building to code.

Mrs. Benc said we don't want to have to turn children away 20 years from now. She said the Library is an important part of the community and something will need to be done either sooner or later.

Mr. Schmidt said he would hate to see an opportunity missed. He said this workshop was a great process.

Alt. #2: Rebuild/Expand Existing Structure

and

Alt. #3: New Building, Exact Same Location

Mrs. Goldschein said it will be cheaper to tear it down.

Mayor Ellis said the building was constructed in 1946, and we need to find out when the addition was constructed, as it may be feasible to save the newer part. Councilman Pote added that an option may be to expand toward the barn area or brook area.

Lee Ehrenworth, Canterbury Lane, said it is a far better idea to tear it down and use Warren's Library until ours is rebuilt. He asked if anyone looked into variances needed. He said an architect is needed to make it cost efficient, and there are many people residing here that are very experienced. He said there is a way to do it, there is plenty of room there for 10,000 sq. feet, however, not enough for parking.

Tom Franklin, Wildwood Terrace, said he was speaking as a resident, not a councilperson. He said it is very obvious what the needs are: an elevator, wider doors, handicapped accessible lavatories, siding and roofing.

Mrs. Fiorenza, questioned if the area would need to be blasted and if the structure could withstand that. She noted the waterway nearby.

Mr. Speeney said Alternates 1 and 2 would require the services of a traffic planner.

Mayor Ellis said if the Library were to stay in the current location, an entrance from Valley Road will need to be an option.

Councilman Mobus noted that reconstruction work on the circle is planned for 2008, by the County and he believes it includes an additional lane around the circle which would help the current egress and ingress.

Mrs. Goldschein said cost needs to be considered.

Mrs. Havas said we need to keep an eye on the taxes. She said we are currently paying for the schools, the Ness property, the Police Station, the Lake – she said she hopes the Borough is not “using the charge card” too much.

Mrs. Paternak said, logistically, it makes sense to build a new Library, although she would hate to see that building gone and maybe the Borough could keep it for something else.

Mrs. Niegisch asked if the Borough is “built out”; then does an anticipated increase in population need to be considered? Mr. Speeney said although we are “built out” many residents are sub-dividing their properties. Councilman Franklin said there is always the possibility of redevelopment in the Route 22 areas. Mayor Ellis said there will be no comparison to the increase in population that Warren has experienced.

Alt. #4: New Building, rotated to Face Valley Road

Dr. Ehrenworth said this idea should be left up to the Planners.

Mrs. Quinn said we need a better view – not looking at the back of building.

Ms. Schmidl questioned the parking area.

Mrs. Niegisch said the Arts Center would lose parking.

Mr. Schmidt said we would lose the “campus effect”.

Dr. Ehrenworth questioned if the older folks would be able to make it up the incline.

Mrs. Niegisch said a traffic study would need to be done.

Alt. #5: New Building on Ness Property

Mrs. Addario said she opposes construction on property that was purchased with Green Acre funding, when the purpose was to be for recreation.

Mr. Speeney said the Ness property is a good opportunity for multipurpose use. He said there is 20 acres and 10 can be used for recreation with 10 leftover.

Mrs. Niegisch said she would hate to see the last of our open space built on.

Mr. Calandriello said younger families are moving in and we need to expand. He said the Ness property has land for us to be used. He said he would like to see a multicultural community center.

Librarian Poswencyk said if a new building was built on the Ness property, the money from the sale of the present building could be put towards it.

Mrs. Goldschein said if she needs to go to that end of town to go to the Library, she might as well use Warren’s. Where the Library is now, everyone can walk to it. She said she would be upset if the Borough used land that was purchased for open space.

Mr. Speeney said he would like to make it clear that when the Ness property was purchased, it was with the intent to potentially dedicated portions of it to be built upon by the municipality for municipal purposes.

Mrs. Quinn questioned how much is open space funds and Councilman Franklin replied two cents per hundred.

Alt. #6: New Building, Somewhere Else?

Mrs. Fiorenza suggested the open space on the other side of the lake by Mobus Field. Councilman Mobus replied that it was considered, however, it is in a flood plain.

Councilman Pote (kiddingly) suggested somewhere along Route 22 and mostly everyone shouted out “no”!

Councilman Franklin suggested Camp Endeavor property.

Alt. #7: Join Warren Library

Councilman Franklin said that joining the Warren Library would cost more in the long run, and Mayor Ellis said it was too late to consider that option.

Mrs. Quinn said an important part of the Community would be lost.

Mrs. Addario said she was surprised there were not more people in attendance, however, if you begin to build a new building, they will all come out.

Librarian Poswencyk reminded all that the report that was presented to the Council is available for viewing on the website.

Councilman Pote summed up the public's comments on the **Current Alternatives Review** as follows:

Alt. #1: Maintain Existing Structure

- Want to, but need ADA compliance or lawsuit
- Cost prohibitive (unknown)
- Can structure withstand elevator/construction
- Windows currently blocked
- Bad floor plan
- It's a house
- Bring up to code/Tech compliant
- It will be needed at some point
- We have the momentum now – do something

Alt. #2: Rebuild/Expand Existing Structure

- Cheaper just to tear down
- Children's room was added/ date?
- Expand by barn? brook?
- Getting variances?
- Codes: out of steel? sticks?
- Tear down – rebuild: architect needed
- Elevator, doorway, bathrooms, siding, windows, some sashes
- Withstand blasting? Other homes
- Traffic planner needed

Alt. #3: New Building, Exact Same Location

- Might get a consensus on Alt 3 or 4
- Can we do it now?
- Taxes stretched: Schools, Ness, Public Works, Lake, etc.
- Logistically makes sense – but possible
- Keep charm, keep Library
- Are we built out? Future population?

Alt. #4: New Building, Rotated to Face Valley Road

- New Main Entrance
- Better presentation
- Art Center would lose parking
- Do we lose “campus effect” with the Art Center?
- Sacrifice garage/barn next to library
- Left turns – egress to Valley Road a concern

Alt. #5: New Building, On Ness Property

- Some residents very opposed – funding came from open space
- Consider multiple uses of Ness Property
 - a. 11 Buildable acres
 - b. Leaving 10 acres
 - c. Should be considered
- Need to do something – create cultural area
 - a. Keep option open
- Sell existing structure? To Valley Furniture?
- Open Space said “no way”
- Warren's Library is too close
- Existing structure location is OK

Alt. #6: New Building, Somewhere Else?

- Mobus Field – flood plain
- East end of Best Lake
- Camp Endeavor
- Swap a property

Alt. #7: Join Warren Library

- They do not want us
- Not viable now
- Lose culture/identity
- Purpose/mission

Part 4: Refurbishment versus new construction

Not addressed separately.

Closing: Summary and Next Steps

Councilman Pote advised the residents present that the blue sheet at the rear of the room is an informal survey regarding alternatives and requirements and encouraged the public to fill them out. He reminded residents that Session II of this workshop will be held on May 31st at 7:00 PM.

Mayor Ellis thanked all for attending and for their input. He thanked Councilman Pote for doing a great job.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned to the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Mayor and Council to be held at 7:30 PM on Thursday, May 25, 2006 and Library Workshop Meeting, Session 2 - May 31, 2006 at 7:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle DeRocco
Deputy Clerk