

BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG

MINUTES

WORKSHOP MEETING OF JUNE 5, 2006

7:00 P.M.

MAYOR'S STATEMENT: Mayor Ellis called the meeting to order at 7:05 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]

Councilman Black arrived at 8:00 P.M.

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

There were 26 people from the public present.

DISCUSSION:

Mayor Ellis welcomed all and explained that this is the second session of the two scheduled Library Workshop meetings. He reminded everyone that the public is welcome to comment at any time, via e-mail, letters, or during the public portion of any council meeting.

Councilman Pote explained to the public present that handouts were available in the rear of the Council Chambers, in particular, a blue form which was a questionnaire. He said many of these have been returned and the input is very helpful and valuable and will be used to consider the final decision.

Councilman Pote referred to a printout posted in several areas of the room of the Borough's Capital & Debt Payback Schedule and explained that this is a layout of the Borough's current debt structure.

Introduction: Objectives and Ground Rules 00:05

Councilman Pote explained that the objective is to formally gather input and ideas from the public in regard to specific changes to the Library. This workshop provides opportunity for the public to express their feelings and an opportunity for open dialog between the public and the Mayor and Council in regard to the Library's future. Councilman Pote said all ideas are good ideas and asked all present to be respectful of the times allotted for each category, and requested Watchung residents to speak first. He asked all to stay on the subject.

Summary Review of May 18th Workshop 00:15

Councilman Pote thanked Administrator/Clerk Lauren Fellin and Deputy Clerk Michelle DeRocco for providing the minutes of the first workshop meeting so quickly and efficiently. He advised the public that the minutes have not been officially approved and accepted by the governing body so the copies that are available in the rear of the room were only "draft" copies.

Councilman Pote summarized last workshop as follows:

Inadequacies of Current Facility:

- Space poorly organized
- Lack of space
- Site location/egress are inadequate with traffic issues
- Facility not ADA compliant
- Is it a Library or community center?
- Library overtaken by videos
- Are books still available online?
- What is the purpose? Need to consider the needs of the town beyond Library use
- Tax implications - Taxes high already
- 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 available, current it is 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 may be correctable
- More space equals more programs
- 21st Century Libraries are media centers

New Library Facility Requirements:

- The original Library Advisory Board recommendation was 12,000 Sq. feet and 40 parking spaces
- Inclusion is good = crossover into other non-traditional library uses
- Historic: Problem with others using area
- Seniors: Is it fair to them not to have a dedicated space?
- Community center vs atmosphere (community meeting area)
- How many people actually use the Library?
- Media center necessary to keep with the changing times
- Keep friendly, helpful atmosphere
- What is the purpose/mission - In electronic age – will drive solution
- Separate space for activities different activities, i.e.: homework area
- Second story possibility
- Media on one floor
- Browsing ability still needed
- Need for direct access to books still important (not just via online)

Current Alternatives Review:

Alt. #1: Maintain Existing Structure

- 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
- 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
- Need to do something – create cultural area
- Keep option open
- Sell existing structure?
- 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

Dorothy Addario, Rock Avenue, commented that the Library as it is now, costs the taxpayers of Watchung \$600,000. per year and said she would like to know how much a new or bigger building would cost the taxpayers. Jim Hecht, Director of the Somerset County Library, explained that there would be an increase in the cost of utilities and that is a responsibility of the town, although a new building would be much more energy efficient. He explained that the costs such as salaries are spread over all of the towns that participate in the system, and towns who have expanded have received assistance from the County.

Walt Niegisch, Tuttle Road, commented that the Library’s “wish list” is still available for viewing on the web site.

Susan Feibush, Washington Drive, inquired as to how a Library could be built on the Ness property when it was designated as Open Space and Mayor Ellis explained that when the land was purchased, three acres were designated as municipal use.

Mr. Niegisch said that we (the residents) should not delude ourselves with the hope of having a library as the Bridgewater Library because Watchung does not have the space available.

Gail Pearlman, Valley Road, said she believes a library built on the Ness property, so close to Warren’s library, is a ludicrous idea. She said she has been here through the Police building renovations, then the school renovations and does not believe the Borough should undertake another huge project. She said she believes Watchung should build a new, small library to fit the needs of the residents. Councilman Pote explained that this is the purpose of the workshop meetings, and agreed that the Borough needs to remain grounded.

Mr. Niegisch said discussion needs to be held in regard to the possibility of sharing a facility with the Arts Center, and added that the parking is inadequate. He suggested moving the library closer to the brook to increase the parking and benefit both the library and the Arts Center.

Mrs. Addario said she strongly objects to putting the library on the Ness property. She said she would like to see the library remain at its present location.

Councilman Pote explained that a Library Committee is needed to put a plan in place. He said it is important to know how many people actually use the library. Mr. Hecht said there are records on the number of items loaned out to Watchung residents, but no records on how many people actually use the library. He suggested having a door count, however, Councilman Mobus said he did not feel that it would be accurate.

Eileen Dicken, Scott Drive, suggested the Borough move Mobus Field to the Ness property and build a new library there. Councilman Mobus said it is a flood plain.

Ideas on Location of Watchung Library 00:30

Marilyn Goldstein, Hill Hollow Road, said she uses the library often and that many high school students use the Bridgewater Library and the residents on the west side of town use Warrens'. She said she doesn't see any reason to spend money on a new building resulting in an increase in taxes.

Mrs. Addario said we are a small community with other resources available.

Ira Dicken, Scott Drive, said many Borough services could be merged with Warren.

Paula Barrameda, Mountain Boulevard, said she has visited the Warren Library maybe twice, that she enjoys going to the local library where she can meet other residents. She said she would like to see a bigger Watchung Library.

Councilwoman Joren asked if there could be a "shared services" relationship between the Arts Center and the library for the children's programs and Librarian Doug Poswencyk explained that the library has had such an agreement with the Arts Center and noted that all of the children's programs are literary based, including the craft program. Andrew Calandriello, Chairman of the Library Advisory Board and resident of Hughes Lane, said the Arts Center has their problems with space also and they have met previously with the Arts Center to discuss combining entities, however, he understood that it is the desire of the governing body to keep the two buildings separate.

Michelle Garfinkel, Sunlit Drive, said the current library is antiquated and not safe, however, the presence of a library is necessary for the image and identity of the town. She said Doug and his staff have a good relationship with the schools and work with the school staff to support programs.

Councilman Pote asked if anyone was in favor of using the Ness property to house a new library and Don Speeney, Planning Board Chairman and resident of Stanie Glen Road, said he believes the Ness property represents opportunity and believes the Mayor and Council should look at the property in terms of the Master Plan. He said the Open Space Plan clearly states what the property can be used for. He said although it does not say "library", it says municipal uses.

Mr. Calandriello said the Library Advisory Board is recommending a new building on the Ness property because there is no other land in the Borough available to be built on.

Mr. Dicken asked who owned the property behind the Rescue Squad building and suggested "eminent domain". He was advised that the Rescue Squad owns that property.

Mr. Speeney said another reason the Ness property is attractive to him is because of the traffic situation around the circle.

Walt Ferdirko, Lakeview Avenue, said he was inclined to think the Ness property is the best place and the location is no further than anything else. He said the building, as it is now, needs to be torn down.

Councilman Mobus said he has been contacted by several contractors in town who are offering their input as to the possibilities of renovating the current building to a multiple level and possible facing Valley Road or Best Lake, however, it is all just discussion right now. Mrs. Addario reminded all that the area around the Library is all bedrock.

Councilman Pote summed up the public's comments on the **Ideas on Location of Watchung Library** as follows:

- Ness Property - Master Plan
 - Green Acres
 - Open Space / Multi faceted uses
- Lack of other alternatives
- Existing location – blasting?
- Current egress issues vs. Ness property, not on circle
- Contractors recommend renovation to face Valley Road
- Will it be used by high school students
- Shared services with Arts Center
- Essence of our town
- Enjoy “going local” – enjoy seeing bigger

Discussion on Source of Funding for Library Reconstruction

00:30

Councilman Pote began the discussion by saying that whatever decision is made for the future of the library, funding needs to be discussed. He asked Mr. Hecht for some insight as to how other towns have funded theirs. Mr. Hecht said most recently in Peapack, the “friends group” raised about \$1,000,000. He explained the project went out to bid and all bids received were too high so it is being re-bid, however, that is the most money any group has raised for a library, as far as he knows. He said in Hillsborough, the town paid for all but \$50,000. and in Warren their Library Advisory Board raised \$300,000. for furnishings when it was renovated and the town paid for everything else. He said in Bridgewater, all of the funding came from the town. Mayor Ellis said in Princeton Borough, all of the monies were from fundraising and it was an \$8,000,000. project. He said we need to develop a good business plan and is confident people will respond to it.

Councilman Mobus asked Mr. Hecht how the County would feel about a corporate sponsor and he replied that Chubb was a sponsor for the Warren Library. He said it is not unusual to name a room or something after a sponsor. Christine Fiorenza, Valley Drive, asked how the town would raise the money and Mr. Hecht explained through fundraisers. He said that Peapack had 4 or 5 residents donate \$100,000. each and to keep in mind that Peapack has half (1/2) the number of residents that Watchung has. He said they also hired a professional fundraiser consultant.

Councilman Pote summed up the public's comments on the **Discussion on Source of Funding for Library Reconstruction** as follows:

- Review of how surrounding towns funded their libraries
- Need a business plan
- Good percentage by donation
- Sponsorship for rooms, furniture, etc.
- How to raise money – door to door/surveys/Advisory and Friends Committees
- Donations

Thoughts on Required and Available Assistance/Expertise from the Public

00:15

Councilman Pote said people have told him that “if you build it (library), we will help”

Mrs. Fiorenza said the Borough is full of people who can contribute in one way or another. She offered the advice that when it comes to the bidding of the project, that it makes sense to get a subcontractor, someone who is internally in control. Councilman Mobus explained that if the town is building it, there are guidelines that need to be followed.

Wendy Robinson, Hill Hollow Road, said that the parking lot at Phillips Field was recently constructed totally by donations. She said there was a long list of people who donated and the Borough can reach out to them. Mayor Ellis said he is sure this can be done.

Councilman Pote said that he believes this is a good starting point.

Mrs. Fiorenza said that it is really important to have a set of plans and have people look at it and fine tune it, and not to leave it totally up to the contractor.

Mr. Fedirko said a location needs to be decided upon, as well as a decision as to rebuilding it or renovating it, before anything is considered.

Councilman Pote summed up the public's comments on **Thoughts on Required and Available Assistance/Expertise from the Public** as follows:

- Borough has a lot of expertise – Architects/Excavators/Contractors
- Need to stay within the guidelines
- Strict supervision of project necessary

Open Discussion

00:15

Mr. Niegisch said that our current Library is really good at ordering materials from other libraries and he does not believe a huge facility is needed.

Mrs. Addario said she would like to see goals and objectives from a committee, as well as information as to what the futurists are predicting about brick and mortar and the library of the future. She said she believes we have gone as far as we can for now.

Mrs. Fiorenza said she agrees with Mrs. Addario and to include the future of the circle as to practicality of the current location.

Mrs. Pearlman asked if this is something that could go to a referendum and Mayor Ellis said it could.

Summary and Outline of Next Steps

00:10

Councilman Pote summed up the public's comments as follows:

- Land Utilization – Refurbish estimate on file
- Cost to make current library ADA compliant - \$800,000
 - Cost of converting to 2 floors
 - Hidden costs of expansion – manpower, county tax, utilities
 - Bottom Line- use of library
- Bottom Line- use of library
- Goals for committee
 - Resources available from county
 - Develop purpose and objectives – fitting to town
 - Gather facts
 - Futurists – what are they saying?
- More information needed
 - Future population, including school projections
 - Future of circle
 - Referendum

Mayor Ellis thanked Councilman Pote for the profitable workshops and the structure. He explained that he plans to appoint a committee by the end of the month. He said he will charge that committee to come back with a plan by the end of the year. He said he would like to see a presentation of a report by January of 2007, which would be open to public comment. Mayor Ellis said he hopes to be interviewing architects by the spring of 2007 and like to see it out to bid by 2008, anticipating approximately 6 months of building time. He said 'how long' and 'how much' are two very important questions for the council and the residents.

Mr. Calandriello asked Mayor Ellis how many people he plans to have on the committee and he replied he plans on 8 or 9 and added that it will have to be an intense group.

Mayor Ellis thanked all for coming this evening and said we are all stakeholders. He asked for the comments, calls and emails to keep coming.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 8:35 pm to the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Mayor and Council to be held at 7:30 PM on Thursday, June 8, 2006.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle DeRocco
Deputy Clerk