Library proposes $6.9M expansion and upgrade, following ‘collaborative process’

By Elizabeth Floyd Mair

GUILDFORD — The library architect Paul Mays last Thursday unveiled plans — about a year in the making and adding to the Guilford Public Library, making it more accessible and relevant.

The goal, Mays said, was to make the library more of a community space — a comfortable place besides work and home where people want to spend time.

Costs for the scaled-back expansion and upgrade would total about $6.5 million, roughly half of the $13 million for nearly doubling the size of the Guilford library, a plan that voters soundly defeated in 2012.

Developing the current plans, still in draft form, was a “very collaborative process,” Mays said, involving months of hearing from the public as well as working with the library’s staff, board, and foundation, Mays said.

His Hellman firm, Rowland Rowland Mays, has worked on projects — including master planning and site development — projects and additions — with at least 15 other New York State and the region.

Staff primarily wants a robust and comfortable space, said a community leader with experience for hands-on programming; and a “third space,” or a place the entire community can use, and indoor reading nooks.

Employees also wanted improved staff workspace and character added to the building.

The public, he said, is mainly interested in safety and accessibility, a café where people can feel comfortable hanging out a robust and imaginative classroom for reading nooks.

Library patrons also want to maintain and improve “the traditional collection.”

“The library in not just a transactional place where you go to get something and leave,” Mays said.

The collection

On Wednesday, library director Timothy Wiles said that the print collection will stay about the same size that it is now — slightly larger than average for a municipality under the size of Guilford — but it will displayed a little differently. The current shelf system consists of walls with shelves mostly of single units, so the items are not visible to see over them.

The library will move to a system of mostly four-shelf units resembling the shelves in the store, the public will be able to track their teenager as he or she walks to the back of the library.

The library likely have about the same budget for new acquisitions that the library currently budgets, Wiles said, but will use a little more creative programming to fill in the gaps of blockbuster titles and movies, so that people don’t have to wait so long for the latest blockbusters.

Shelving would be on locating where poster collections, the shelves of the way space is needed for a very large, high-profile event like the Lilac Festival, noting the meteors Mete pitcher and brown trout in the same room.

A gathering space with folding chairs could be created in the basement of the 1827 meetinghouse, which would be used for all-ages, as compared to the 212 that is the maximum capacity of the former Helelber Room.

In the basement, the gathering space probably would also be used for events like the fund-raiser for the new children’s library, which will feature New York State writer’s Institute director Paul Grondahl and novelist Gregory Maguire, said Wiles. These larger events are new, of necessity, held off-site.

Wiles said that needed to be held in the Helelber Room.

The program room, which would be about the size of the Helelber Room, would allow those events to stay within the children’s space.

The children’s space would have many one-and-a-half-person chairs in the library, and chairs to sit together with parents or other caregivers, Mays said.

The young adult space was “carved out” seven or eight years ago, where there was no space for them, and the children’s room and the adult collection, but it leaves something to be desired. For instance, he said, its couch, love seat, and two chairs seat a total of just seven people. “We’re trying to serve more than seven teens at a time,” Wiles said.

The main adult area was designed as a “sity, where they would be a comfortable place for young people to spend time.

Café and book sale

The library would like to try out a café and see how it works, Wiles said on Wednesday. It would be at the entrance, and could potentially be open earlier than the rest of the library.

The café could be run with a number of variables, Wiles said: leased to a business, be run by a parent-co-op, be run by a local college, or run by individuals with a connection to the autism spectrum.

One audience member at the March 16 library board meeting, where the plans were presented, asked if the café wouldn’t encourage spills on print books, but Wiles pointed out that library policy already allows patrons to bring food and drink into all parts of the library, except rooms that house original historical documents.

The café plans call for a dedicated permanent book-sale space, but Wiles said on Wednesday that the permanent book sale might be moved into the café instead, to give the café a unique identity and allow the space set aside for it to be merged into the adjoining meeting room, to increase the meeting room’s size.

Plains for the updated design of the Guilford Public Library are still in draft form, but include a bigger and better children’s room, young-adult room, and main collection; more and bigger meeting rooms; a cafe; improved staff work space; and a safer, greener parking lot.

Currently, patrons enter and face the circulation desk, with its line of librarians standing in front of a wall. By flipping the main entrance sideways, so that patrons enter through what is now a large window to the left, the interior decor, the plan will take advantage of the building’s best architectural feature — the ability to see all the way through the building to the windows on the far wall.

Parking

The parking lot will be reconfigured. One important feature would be a narrowed traveling lane — with clearer directional signs — to slow traffic through the lot.

The book drop, now located at the entrance to the lot, which Wiles says creates a bottleneck, will be moved. It will be closed to the front door, on a walking path that will extend along the center of the parking lot for easy access from either of two parking aisles.

The parking lot will be larger, accommodating the two lots that the library recently gave to the school district, and will have more benches and trees. There may be a café at the entrance of the building, with outdoor tables and chairs.

Wiles said on Wednesday that parking lot improvements may not be pursued, but may be set aside until five years or so from now, since staggering a project into two phases can increase the odds of receiving state library construction grant funding for a larger portion of each phase.

The draft plans estimate site preparation and development at $450,000, and interior building system repairs and upgrades are estimated at $2 million. Building construction within the existing footprint would cost about $1.5 million. Building new construction would require about $3.7 million. Fire protection costs would be about $100,000.

A contingency fund would be set aside of about $450,000, and furnishings are set at about $140,000. Soft costs such as design and legal fees would total about $200,000.

The total estimated cost is $6.9 million.

Other funding sources including the library’s capital account, the foundations, the Library, fundraising, staff aid obtained through matching grants, and other sources of funding are all still to be determined, as is the amount that would need to be funded through a referendum.

“Merry Christmas Lane”

In other business, board heard from town fiscal officer Peter Barber, who spoke at the library board meeting on a proposal for developments involving Merry Christmas Lane.

He said that town officials are looking into whether the road might be closed to the town in the future.

Barber said Wednesday that St. Peter’s Health Partners, which owns Our Lady of Good Counsel Church, is planning to up-gate one of its buildings, and that, in conjunction with that plan, the center approached the town with the idea of converting the town the portion of Merry Christmas Lane.

The rest of the private road is owned by First Columbia.

Town officials are re-examining the road to town standards, which might be done partly by St. Peter’s Health Partners, which owns our Lady of Good Counsel Church, said Barber Wednesday.

Barber said Wednesday that town officials have received a temporary easement to inspect the road, Barber said Wednesday.

Highway Superintendent James Oliver was confident, Barber said, that his department would handle work on the road.

The private road, which patrons used, serves as a way for people to travel to Winding Brook Drive and out to the traffic light at Route 20, and to Winding Brook Drive and out to traffic since Christmas, Barber said Wednesday.

It was also understood that the road was closed after someone whose car was damaged by a pothole filed a claim against the road’s owner.