

**PUBLIC MEETING
NEW LIBRARY BUILDING COMMITTEE
TO DISCUSS
PORTSMOUTH ARMORY BUILDING
&
SECTION 106 PROCESS**

7:00 PM

CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS

June 11, 2003

New Library Building Committee Members Present:

Chairman, John O'Leary; John Bohenko, City Manager (ex-officio); Paul McEachern; John Hynes; Todd Hanson; Phyllis Eldridge; Sherm Pridham, Library Director (ex-officio); Joanne Grasso; Carvel Tefft; John Grossman; Claudia Morner

Also present:

Edna Feighner and Linda Wilson, from New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources; Steve Parkinson, Public Works Director; and, Cindy Hayden, Community Development Director

John O'Leary, the Chairman of the New Library Building Committee called the meeting to order. We are here to participate in the Section 106 Process. We are meeting in the public session and as part of the meeting, there will be a public hearing to talk through the process. He then turned the meeting over to Cindy Hayden.

Cindy Hayden, the City's Community Development Director, welcomed the public and gave a brief overview of the Section 106 Process. The JFK site was the site selected and endorsed by the City's Boards and Committees. After it was endorsed, the JFK Armory that was built in 1914, was nominated to be on the National Register and because the City also needs a Federal Permit to construct a library the site, that triggers the 106 process. The Section 106 process is a public dialogue a last look at – is there a way to avoid, minimize or mitigate negative impacts on historic structures. A library on the site would negatively impact that building because it would be removed. We have had, to date, one public meeting on the 106 process on May 6, 2003 and well over 100 people attended to voice their opinions. On May 27, 2003 a meeting where consulting parties were invited, such as historic groups in town, The New Hampshire Preservation Alliance, Portsmouth Advocates, the Portsmouth Historical Society as well as abutters to the property and others who have expressed interest.

Tonight we are here to report back on what was discussed at the May 27, 2003 meeting and a major issue that came out of that meeting was that the Bridge Street site was proposed as an alternative site. The Bridge Street site was one of fourteen sites that was considered; however, under the 106 process, we need to take another look at the Bridge Street site – can the library project go forward on the other site as a means to avoid negative impacts on the Armory building. Ms. Hayden stated that Ms. Wilson and Ms. Feighner were present this evening from the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources acting as technical resources on the 106 process. The staff has taken a fresh new look at the Bridge Street lot regarding technical and cost issues associated with developing the library. Mr. Steve Parkinson is also present and will give an overview of that technical information later on. Mr. Sherm Pridham, the Library Director will provide his overview of how the Bridge Street Lot will work or will not work. When the Bridge Street lot was originally considered, we were looking at a larger library being 52,000 s.f.

vs. a 38,000 s.f. library. We are also aware that when the Bridge Street lot was initially considered, it included a fly-over pedestrian bridge across Islington Street. There was consensus then that that didn't work and we have taken that into account here.

This meeting is to report back to the public whether the Bridge Street lot is still a site to allow the library project to move forward and is not a meeting to talk about the JFK site itself. Ms. Hayden then introduced Mr. Parkinson who would discuss the technical issues of the Bridge Street lot.

Mr. Parkinson stated the lot is paved at grade and contains 64 parking spaces. The site is long and narrow being 65' x 293' and containing 19,000 s.f.. The site is surrounded by busy streets and will be a tight construction area. Construction equipment will have to be delivered off-site and trucked in to create vehicular and pedestrian safety. Mr. Parkinson then addressed the subsurface investigation that was done in August of 1996 by Haley & Aldrich. Mr. Parkinson then made reference to a number of PowerPoint slides. Their results from probes, borings and cores were as follows:

- miscellaneous granular and rubble fill blanket the sloping site;
- relatively shallow bedrock and dense glacial till directly below the surface fill in the Islington Street end and central portions of the lot;
- medium stiff to soft marine clay soils below the surface fill the Hanover Street end of the lot;
- 14 borings/probes were done throughout the lot;
- 10 additional borings/probes were done in areas with shallow refusal to confirm original borings/probes;
- refusal at Islington Street end of lot 6.4' – 8.6';
- refusal middle of lot 3.0'
- refusal Hanover Street end of lot 19.6';
- subsurface conditions will have a significant cost impact on construction at this site; and,
- premium site development costs will be associated with rock excavation.

Mr. Parkinson then discussed parking:

- 64 Parking spaces exist in the on grade parking lot;
- parking studies conducted by VHB in 1996 showed that parking was at a premium in this area;
- overall study area had a peak utilization rate of 84% with the off street parking lots having a peak utilization rate of 93%;
- utilization rate is the comparison of occupied spaces versus total supply;
- generally when parking utilization rates approach 85% motorists will find parking availability so limited that they are forced to search for an available space resulting in frustration and unnecessary vehicle trips through the area;
- the existing on street and off-street parking supply in the vicinity of the library is for all practical purposes at capacity;
- the construction of the library on the Bridge Street lot requires that the 64 existing spaces will need to be replaced;
- library as sized in 1996 at 52,000 s.f. required 101 spaces. Given the dimensions of the lot, three floors of parking would have been needed to accommodate the projected demand;
- the library itself needed three floors based on program requirements of 52,000 s.f.;

- due to height restrictions above street elevations, set at 60' by the Zoning Ordinance, parking levels were proposed to be constructed underground;
- cost to provide just the parking was estimated in 1996 dollars at \$4.125 to \$4.96 million or \$25,000 - \$30,000 per space; and,
- this factor by itself made the site cost prohibitive.

Current Review

- since the 1996 review, the program size of the library has been reduced from 52,000 s.f. to 38,000 s.f.
- in re-looking at the Bridge Street lot site, due to the down sizing of the square footage, the library can now be accommodated strictly from a s.f. basis in two levels;
- the City has looked at the scenario of the library taking up two levels with one level of parking above grade and partial level of parking from Hanover Street end of the site on grade to minimize ledge removal;
- This would supply approximately 50 parking spaces on the full level and approximately 20 spaces on a lower level for a total of about 70 spaces;
- current cost for construction of parking garage spaces in urban areas is \$15,000 - \$20,000 per space. This would equate to a cost of \$1,050,000 to \$1,400,000 just for the parking construction;
- these 70 spaces would satisfy the library need but not replace the 64 existing Bridge Street spaces;
- the 64 existing spaces would need to be replaced at some other location at a similar cost of \$15,000 to \$20,000 per space for an additional cost of \$960,000 to \$1,280,000;
- total cost to replace existing spaces and provide library spaces will be \$2,010,000 to \$2,680,000.

In conclusion, the Library cannot be built without adequate parking being provided on site and replacement of the existing 64 spaces on the Bridge Street lot. This component comes with a significant price tag that is in addition to the cost of constructing the library itself. Without these spaces, the lack of parking will continue to be a barrier to the convenient use of the library by its patrons and a detriment to the commercial businesses in the immediate area.

Mr. Parkinson introduced Sherm Pridham, the Director of the Library who also used several PowerPoint slides to illustrate his comments.

- Mr. Pridham stated the word programming is used a lot and illustrated just exactly what that is. He added that library services are measured and counted and then the space needed for the next 20 years is projected;
- then we figure the most efficient way to move materials, staff and patrons through the building safely and efficiently;
- we then work with the architect to work with the floor plans;
- a flat square site is needed for flexibility; therefore, a circular library would not be a good choice because it is very inefficient, wasteful and sometimes not very safe;
- the Bridge Street Lot is very narrow and located in a sea of traffic with no outside green areas;
- the narrow site limits design options and is very difficult to fit programs into;
- there is no place to safely drop off passengers or make deliveries;
- crossing streets is dangerous;

- library users will have to enter the library above street level. If they entered at the far end of the building, they would have to walk through the whole building for services;
- handicapped access is a challenge above ground; and
- the site discourages walkers, even the seniors at Farragut.

In summary:

- library spaces that make up a library are interdependent;
- a flexible site is needed to allow for design of a library that is inexpensive to operate and safe and efficient for the public to use;
- fitting the library's building program into the narrow and sloped Bridge Street site dramatically limits the flexibility needed;
- this narrow site will create inefficiencies of moving users and materials through the building;
- these inefficiencies translate into greater costs for increased staff to provide for safety and customer service.

Chairman O'Leary thanked Mr. Parkinson and Mr. Pridham for their input. Mr. O'Leary then opened the discussion up for members of the New Library Building Committee.

Mr. John Grossman stated he agreed with Mr. Pridham's comments and added that he and his wife visit at least one library a week and during the past year, we have been in at least 30 – 35 libraries. There is only one library that follows the rectangular design. Every other library has different type designs with one to three floors.

Ms. Claudia Morner stated that as a librarian on this committee a long skinny building is probably more costly to build, less efficient and does not work as well. She would rather see a square building than a rectangular building. We have spent hours and hours talking about traffic and this site on the Bridge Street lot is ridiculous because of the issue of traffic.

Mr. Grossman stated he would like to hear a Council member speak on the issue of the City Parking Garage and the Mayor has indicated that she felt that the garage is not a safe place or a comfortable place for women.

Mr. Bohenko stated a report was received back from the Parking and Transportation Division and the Police Department who indicated that the safety issue is not an issue in Portsmouth. The safety issue of people in a garage would not be an issue and the cost issue would outweigh any safety issue. He added that he feels the Police Department has provided information that does not bear out safety concerns about the City Parking Garage.

Ms. Morner, a librarian, stated that children are prey to pedophiles in libraries and this is a real worry.

Mr. Tefft stated the new vision for the downtown area is that many of the new buildings in the downtown include parking underground. He feels this is an opportunity not a liability. However, this particular site has a story and a half that is open space and not enclosed. It is his understanding that the cost for one space is \$17,000 on an open parking area and he feels that 150 spaces could be found underneath the building. He feels that this business of underground parking being a safety hazard is not an issue.

Ms. Joanne Grasso stated what she has seen available in the JFK lot that is not available on the Bridge Street lot is that the library is more open and safer. She has a real concern the staff will not be able to monitor the whole area of the library, particularly for children and any one of us. We need to feel safe and a linear design does not allow that to happen. The Bridge Street lot would not have any space available for outdoor programming for children.

Mr. Todd Hanson stated he also agreed with other members of the Building Committee; however, the diagram we see is not a subterranean parking lot, which does answer some of the questions. What he sees here is a library on stilts built on top of the parking garage. It has no pedestrian feel. Mr. Hanson stated that 100% of the people who access the library will have to enter a staircase or elevators from an entrance point. The JFK site provides a much less expensive and safer environment. The Bridge Street site shows that we can build the library at grade and up, but the cost will be in excess of One Million Dollars just for parking.

Mr. John Hynes stated he feels that all the space issues have been addressed and the architectural designs as well. To build a library in a commercial area that will draw children and adults into the area, the dangers will be much higher and feels a library will not fit the streetscape. Now, when the Kennedy Center was chosen, it just fit in everything such as the senior citizens needs; the school needs; and put it into an area where everything else was non-commercial. There is no perfect place for the Library, but he feels the Kennedy Center is doable and the other sites that were reviewed had problems. At a prior meeting, he asked the Chair to take a vote and it was 19 – 1 for the Kennedy Center and is probably the site we will have to use.

Mr. Paul McEachern stated the issues that this presents on the Bridge Street lot and does not know why we are revisiting – it is an invitation to chaos – look at the access – from Hanover Street – one access in and out – it is uninviting and he added he does not understand why it could be put forth as an alternative to the JFK site. We are making fools of ourselves by treating this seriously.

Mr. Ralph DeBernardo of 1374 Islington Street stated he does not believe that the JFK presents enough historically for us to select another site that would be a poor second choice for our library. This community has a very strong historic district Ordinance, and added he did not feel that an apology is needed for deciding that the JFK is not significant enough to save. However, he does have a question about the process. Is this the end of considering alternative sites tonight? There will not be enough parking at this alternative site; it is too busy an area for children and seniors. There will be an impact on business and traffic and he feels the proposal would be an ugly parking garage. The safety issue at the large parking garage is that they were built to look like prisons.

Mr. DeBernardo then addressed the statement that there are other buildings within the City that have incorporated a parking garage on the first floor and most of those face secondary streets or back streets. This parking garage would be visible from all four sides and even worse than the Hanover Street garage.

Mr. Parkinson stated the current size of the Bridge Street parking lot is 65' x 293' lot being long and narrow and surrounded on all four sides by streets making it a very tight area. Equipment will have to be stockpiled and trucked back to the site. Vehicle and pedestrian safety will be an issue. There are 64 parking spaces on the lot. Vehicles will not be able to find a parking space and will have to circulate the area frequently. It will be cost prohibitive due to the down slope of the lot. Fifty parking spaces will be provided on one level and 20 spaces on the lower level. We

do not want a site that is circular because it would create a safety hazard and would not be efficient. This particular site is flat and surrounded by a sea of traffic and very little green space. Staff parking will have to be added.

Mr. John Grossman stated he visits a different library every weekend that have different type designs. He feels that a square building makes more sense than a rectangle building and the Bridge Street site is ridiculous. The parking garage can be quite expensive. Mr. Grossman stated that at a recent Council meeting, the Mayor was quoted as saying that the parking garage is not a safe place for women to be.

Mr. John Bohenko stated the cost issue would outweigh a safety issue

Mr. Sherm Pridham, stated the Library program is a guideline for building the library

Mr. Paul McEachern stated he has been on the Library committee for the past 35 years and will probably go on for the next 35 years before a decision is made. He feels there is probably no perfect place for the library; however, the JFK Center is the best choice. The Bridge Street site is so far out and it would be very difficult to get in and out. We are making fools of ourselves.

Ms. Kelly Tefft residing on stated she has been on many Boards over the years. She presented her rendition of the library for the Bridge Street site adding that the top of the building could be used as a deck. She then discussed the benefits for the site on the Bridge Street lot:

- the property is City owned;
- it is in a downtown location as well as a high profile location;
- this location will create new growth opportunities for both the Northern Tier and the Islington Street corridor as well as stimulate redevelopment;
- less site preparation than the JFK site will expedite the new library project;
- ample underground parking would increase accessibility during inclement weather and reduce snow removal costs. There could be additional parking provisions on the future Worth lot adjacent to the site;
- traffic and safety concerns can be better-controlled downtown with automated traffic lights. This site will present less unsupervised child/pedestrian traffic issues caused by overintensifying a school zone, recreational area and residential neighborhood at the Parrot Avenue site;
- there will be room for vertical expansion;
- until the need for increased spaces arises, the roof may be used as a solarium garden which could be glass enclosed;
- a new 38,000 s.f. library on the Bridge Street site will beautify a major intersection at a gateway to the downtown area;
- there would be less landscaping and maintenance costs;
- minimal moving costs;
- no demolition costs;
- destruction of the Portsmouth Armory would be the first demolition in the City in 25 years;
- this site will not destroy an existing historic building on its original site worth 1.6 million dollars. Add the value of the JFK building to the cost of a new library on that site; and,
- Bridge Street is within walking distance for senior housing, schools and neighborhoods.

Ms. Tefft indicated that the City has gone through a very extensive site selection process for a new library. This was done under the direction of the New Library Building Committee who

looked at 14 different sites and used very specific criteria to determine which site to select. The JFK Memorial Building on Parrott Avenue, also known as the Armory, is the site that was selected by the committee and endorsed by the Planning Board and the City Council. The Armory building is eligible to be on the National Register of Historic Buildings. In order to construct a library on the Parrott Avenue site, the Armory building would have to be removed.

Mr. Boyd Morrison residing at 210 Broad Street, stated he liked the idea of having a new library and feels it would be a benefit to the community. However, he believes from a pure land use point of view the Parrott Avenue site is not the best choice. He added that he was on the Vision Committee and had the idea that the Library would be in the downtown area. All City sites were reviewed; however he feels that circulation, access, the City streetscape is quite efficient within the downtown. Mr. Morrison added that he did not feel that creating a Library on the recreation center of Portsmouth is a good idea. He feels that to allow the Library on this site will create many negative feelings on how to get in or out of the site. To use this site has many negatives on Parrott Avenue. There are many questions of how people would get into and out of the site. This is not the ideal site for a Library.

Ms. Elaine O'Brien of Hayes Park in Exeter, stated she will support the statements made by the two people before her. She has visited libraries in all the New England states; however, we do not know if the JFK is a doable site.

Mr. Robert Shouse of 555 Dennett Street, stated he has lived in Portsmouth all his life and feels the City is in desperate need of a Library and it is time we did something about it. The library should be at the JFK site. The Bridge Street lot is too narrow and was not even a fourth choice. This space would be better used for other uses. It is time that we have a good library. There is no architectural or historical significance for this building. There is no architectural significance at the JFK site and no historic significance at the JFK site and no municipal interest in the JFK site. The best thing the JFK building can do is to give its life up in favor of a good public library that the City desperately needs.

Mr. Jeff Cooper of 227 Park Street stated he noticed that the JFK building is too close to the residential area and feels that if he lived in this area he would not want the library next to him. He added that he was looking over a 1999 Northern Tier feasibility study and feels the JFK site is going in the opposite direction over what the study had suggested.

Mr. Steve Carlier of 22 Willard Avenue, stated the community has reviewed all the information and supports the community. We have been talking about parking and it is a problem but not THE problem and encouraged the committee to push strongly. The Library has been in discussion for 30+ years and feels a stand should be taken that a decision should be made.

Mr. Harold Whitehouse of 58 Humphrey's Court. He complimented Diane Kelly Tefft on her presentation. He stated there are many possibilities for Bridge Street to be able to expand (feels that the Rock of Gibraltar is lost and forgotten). We should make sure we do it right and it is the most controversial issue that he has seen in the past 27 years.

Mr. Tom Morgan of 39 Richards Avenue stated he was a strong supporter of the JFK site for a Library. The most unfortunate decision ever made by the Historic District Commission, was to allow 100 Market Street to go in. If the Library is allowed to be located on Bridge Street, it will be the second greatest mistake. He feels they should discount the Bridge Street site because it is a dangerous place for the elderly to cross the street.

Mr. Paul Elkins of 35 Rogers Street feels that we are opening the door for further types of demolition and it will create problems. The JFK is a solid structure with a slate roof and added it will not work the way it is presented. He asked that the project be given a lot more thought before throwing it under the bus.

Mr. James Daley of 893 Middle Road stated he is against placing the Library at the JFK Center. He was down in this vicinity last week and he could not find a parking space, so he walked from Richards Avenue to the fire station to get a permit. On another occasion, school was letting out and it took at least one to two hours to get the children out of school and onto the buses. He feels this location is not the place for the Library and a better location can be found.

Mr. Jerry Lapriore of 139 South Street stated he would like to revisit the question addressed to Ms. Hayden about presenting alternative sites for consideration and if this was going to continue. He stated he is asking how do you present an alternative site for consideration.

Ms. Hayden replied that the way the Section 106 process works is that we had an original public meeting in early May followed by a meeting of consulting parties. That was an opportunity for those people who had a particular interest in the Library project to bring forth alternatives on avoiding impacts on the Armory Building and to propose alternatives that would avoid or mitigate negative impacts on the Armory Building. Our role is to report that this is the only other alternative site that was raised by consulting parties at that meeting.

Mr. Lapriore stated he knows that there have been discussions about the City acquiring the Worth Parking Lot whose footprint is 275% of the Bridge Street Parking lot. He asked that as a citizen, how could he present this idea.

Mr. O'Leary stated that as discussed before, over the last four or five years, we have invited citizens to present any and all possible sites. At the City Council meeting and at our own Library Committee meeting, we put out a public notice asking anyone to provide us with any or all sites that they would like explored. At that point in time, we received 18 – 20 sites. Some sites were dismissed for various reasons; however, we hired an architect to look at 14 specific sites to do an analysis on. We met as a committee and reduced the 14 sites to 3 or 4. The opportunity to present sites was a very public process and we certainly took into consideration any site that was given to us. Mr. Lapriore replied that he knew that this had been done, but he was talking about Section 106 because things changed between the year 2000 and the year 2003. He feels that most people in the City are being burdened by their taxes and for us to rush into a Library right now, especially with the assumption that the City will receive three million dollars in gifts to help fund it. We are all talking about the site, yet he feels we should be talking about the money as part of this 106 process.

Since there was no further comment from the public, Chairman O'Leary closed the hearing.

Mr. Todd Hanson stated the need for a new Library has been on going for the last 25 years. The process has been quite lengthy and he feels the Bridge Street lot would be perfect if it supported the library. He would love to find a site where there is not opposition. We focused on land that was available. Of the 14 sites that we found were appropriate to analyze, we narrowed it down to one; however, it does have complications, but is the most perfect site. He added that he would love for someone to come in and donate a perfect site. On the Parrott Avenue site, the entry is not 10' above grade but closer to grade as several other buildings in the area. The JFK building is a sound building.

Mr. Hanson stated it has been a difficult process to find a site that has 100% endorsement from the City and we will still be sitting here 25 years from now, discussing it.

Mr. McEachern reiterated that about 35 years ago, he was Chairman of the New Library Committee and a member of the City Council in the late 60's. We discussed a site on Congress Street and nothing happened at that time. In 1974, the City decided to add on to the existing library. Then as time went by we decided on a site and then ultimately decided it wasn't the right site. This whole process has gone on for more than 30 years. If someone comes in and indicates that we are rushing into this, he will not buy it because we have been at it for generations. The present library is over 100 years old. He feels they have been true to the mandates of the City Council and have come up with a choice.

Mr. Tefft stated he would like to talk about the process even if it is over 30 years or for that matter 10 years and asked if there was a reason for this. He stated he was on the Economic Development Commission and a study was done that said specifically if you are going to spend a lot of money on a public edifice you need to put it into an area that will attract private capital. He feels this is a simple concept and has been proven over and over again.

Ms. Eldridge stated she was not sure that the Library had any responsibility to be an economic stimulus for this City. There are intellectual responsibilities, social responsibilities. She feels that the Bridge Street site would not be an attractive addition to the North End. This building would be so completely out of scale with the neighborhood. She added that she did not feel the HDC would ever approve a building such as this. Ms. Eldridge stated she would rather cross Parrott Avenue five times blindfolded then take a child across Islington Street. She feels that the Library Building Committee does not owe the North End any consideration that was not given at the time all the sites were considered. Ms. Eldridge stated she is very much in favor of the Parrott Avenue site.

Mr. Hynes stated there is no question that the Parrott Avenue site has flaws; but it also has charm and a streetscape that would fit a Library into it. It has accessibility for students, senior citizens, etc. A majority of the people agree with this site, but there is a minority that disagree. You do not have a majority vote so how long can you extend your minority of opinions and continue to make the cost grow.

Mr. O'Leary stated there are a couple of options: take no action this evening, stand on actions taken in the past or take an action in any direction.

Mr. McEachern made a motion that the New Library Building Committee should re-affirm their choice that the JFK is the site for the new library and Mr. Hynes seconded.

Mr. Tefft stated that we don't know how 106 will turn out of if there are other mitigating circumstances about the JFK site, or something that will happen along the way that will make the site more troublesome than originally planned. He feels we should have a contingency plan so that we would not lose the momentum of having a new library because it would be within our best interest, and he would prefer that it move as quickly as possible. He feels it would be a benefit to keep our minds open.

Mr. Bohenko stated that there are some issues with the Worth Lot and we have had a financial interest in that particular lot since 1973 when an agreement was entered into. There were some provisions within the Lease that required parking be located on that site. There are air right issues as well. The City will obtain ownership in 2006, but there are many caveats with that. If

a more definitive answer is needed, this topic should be referred to the City Attorney. The City does lease that lot and in exchange we do certain things such as plowing, keeping it maintained and we are reviewing it to put a new municipal parking garage there in the future.

Mr. Hynes stated he did not want a contingency plan but would consider a contingency site that would get a majority opinion. We do not want to extend this process for another 35 years.

Mr. O'Leary stated that any action taken by this Committee is contributing to the 106 process and becomes part of the history or evidence for the process. We are not taking any action that is inconsistent with the action taken by the City Council.

Ms. Eldridge stated she wanted to support Mr. McEachern's motion. She said that a contingency plan is inefficient, financially not viable and that when you make a decision you follow through with it.

Mr. O'Leary called for a vote on the motion to re-affirm the JFK site as the new site for the new library. The motion was approved with Mr. Tefft voting in the negative.

Ms. Hayden thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and for participating.

At 9:20 p.m. the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan M. Long
Planning Department
Secretary

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