

Menlo Park Library Rebuilding Project Meeting #3
Menlo Park Main Library
800 Alma Street, Menlo Park, CA
February 15, 2018

Meeting Notes

Meeting Purpose: Community members learn about the proposed main library rebuilding project including the site options and considerations and give feedback/input.

Meeting Agenda:

- Welcome
- Agenda Review and Group Agreements
- Context and Overview of the Menlo Park Library Rebuilding Project
- Presentation on Site Options
- Clarifying Questions
- Community Feedback Input
- Next Steps/Closing Remarks
- Evaluation and Close

Context and Overview of the Menlo Park Library Rebuilding Project: Nick Szegda introduced project staff and gave a brief presentation on the overview of the project including a review of the previous community meetings. Nick also distributed a memorandum entitled Main Library Siting FAQs that addressed many of the questions staff have received about the library rebuilding project. Chris Noll of Noll & Tam Architects gave a presentation on the need for a new library, schematics of the two possible locations and some of the factors/considerations related to the site options.

Following the presentations, community members had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions.

The following questions were asked and answers were provided by Nick and project staff:

Q: Adding housing will be costly; concerned about funding. What are the additional costs for housing construction?

A: It's about the opportunity costs. Housing may push the project out in time and prevent it from moving forward.

Q: Will the child care facility be relocated/rebuilt?

A: No. The City got a lot of push back about impacting the child care facility.

Q: Is there a designated child care facility during reconstruction?

A: There are no plans for a temporary child care center because the impacts are only construction-related.

Q: Will there be a bond measure? Will the public be able to vote?

A: A bond measure is a possibility. Other ways of getting the funding are raising the utility users tax and loans. A bond measure would require a 2/3 vote. The utility users tax can be raised by the City Council to the voter-approved level.

Q: You are gathering input-- will it go to the City Council for final decision?

A: Yes, the City Council will make the decision.

Q: Will library services be improved?

A: We are constantly looking at improving library services. With the current library, there are some basic services that cannot be provided.

Q: Is there a ballpark cost for both sites? What is the difference in cost?

A: There are no ballpark cost estimates yet. The Laurel site is probably more expensive due to parking.

Q: Are we rebuilding the library to compete with other cities? Is there really a need?

A: Based on the needs assessment, the City believes there is a need to rebuild the library.

Q: What are the costs of funding this project.

A: We are not yet at the stage of developing detailed plans for the library and we don't have details about funding.

Q: Why is housing being taken out? Please clarify.

A: The staff recommendation will not include housing because of complications and costs.

City makes final decision. Is community input really being taken seriously? Community input is being skewed. Transparency of what is talked about in the small groups. How can you make decisions without cost information?

Q: What is the vision for front access at potential Alma site?

A: Location of entrance to Alma site would be at the park.

Q: Are there other ways to give input?

A: Yes—contact Nick Szegda.

Several comments were made during the Q&A session:

- The conclusion read out is different than the small group inputs from the last meeting. Need to clarify real view takeaways and conclusions.
- It seems as if all presentation assumes new library is a foregone conclusion vs. polling the public as to whether we think we need one.
- Who/how many present tonight participated in the public needs assessment? For them: how much repurposing brainstorming was done during the needs assessment or was the entire discussion focused on “what would you like if we were to start fresh and build new?”

- How much thought was taken into consideration and for “meeting space” in a library? Would like to see separate meeting space in a different building.

The following additional questions were received but there was not enough time for answers to be provided (some of these questions were received in writing):

- Could we repurpose the City Council chambers today to host the popular children’s story hour?
- Why does the City Council chambers need to be updated? What about it is insufficient?
- Is the current library safe? Concerned about safety of current library building

Community Feedback/Input: Community members broke into groups to provide feedback on the library options via the following two questions:

1. What are your reactions to what you heard, including the direction in which the City is leaning?
2. What site do you prefer and which factors/considerations are most important to you?

Three groups answered the questions and a fourth group asked additional questions of City staff—these are captured in the question section above. Responses from the three input groups are compiled and categorized below. The number of people who expressed a preference for a site is presented by group.

Q1: What are your reactions to what you heard, including the direction in which the City is leaning?

- New Library/Library Improvements
 - Some are resistant to change
 - It is important to modernize the library
 - Would like some sections of the library to be bigger
 - New library sounds amazing. Would be well used.
 - Would like to see flex space in the library
 - Changing nature of libraries; no areas in existing library for separate uses
 - New library should be like community center
 - Make sure that library services keep up with the new library
 - Good--more child story time, more meeting space
 - Community already has many opportunities for life long learning
 - Too many non-library uses added to library
 - Increase services/hours instead of facilities
 - Existing library can be remodeled and expanded; meeting space can be in a separate space/location
 - Can use Council Chamber for meeting, maker space, and library use
 - There should be no after hours construction

- Would love to see childcare center rolled into project. Parents will be concerned about construction impacts. They should get something out of this.
- Library Need/Costs & Funding
 - Concern with size and reason; i.e. donor money as driver of project
 - Question need and cost—need more transparency (2)
 - Concern about using City money--why not put City money toward renovation? Study other uses for what we have
 - Does not support use of money for this project
 - Need to know financial implications for unknown impacts. Need all costs before making decisions. Clarify #s and costs.
 - Too many unknowns on alternatives
 - With Laurel site, want to know cost of future housing so community knows all the factors
 - Not convinced cost of remodel is as high as a new library
 - Use donor \$\$ for renovated Council Chamber
- Housing
 - Affordable housing is needed in Menlo Park
 - Affordable housing is more important. (2)
 - Sad that affordable housing was taken off the table. Would like to consider housing again as phase 2. Concern about displaced people, homelessness.
 - Poor—no housing on site
 - Housing needs/solutions need to be discussed
 - Placement of housing is important
 - Impact on childcare facility
 - Put housing elsewhere--Nealon Park?
 - Keep housing separate from library project
 - Is Burgess Park suitable for housing?
 - Housing over parking on Laurel
- Process Comments
 - More feedback opportunities needed
 - Concerned that vital info from past and present meetings is not being captured and conveyed—reports are being skewed
 - City should do better advertising of meeting
 - Process is not taking into account comments from the community
 - Meeting discussion should focus on the key topic: if building a new library, focus on that.

Q2: What site do you prefer and which factors/considerations are most important to you?

- Preferences in Group 1:
 - Prefer Laurel site for the library; keep Alma site as an option for housing. (4)
 - Prefer library at Alma site if no housing. If housing is an option, prefer library at Laurel site with housing at Alma site (2)
- Preferences in Group 2:
 - Initially, 10 people preferred the Alma site in part because they were concerned about the impact to the childcare center. 2 people abstained.
 - 6 people agreed with the plan and need for a new library. 4 people would like to see further discussion of other possibilities
 - After understanding that the child care center would not be impacted, ultimately the preferences were expressed as 6 people for Alma and 6 people for Laurel.
- Preferences in Group 3:
 - Prefer Laurel (2)
 - Prefer Alma (2)
 - Prefer to see the existing library remodeled (3)
 - Abstained (2)
 - Like wide green space with Laurel
- Factors/considerations:
 - Prefer Laurel: like wide green space
 - Prefer Laurel: like housing and childcare together
 - Prefer Alma: need increased library services and facility. Like one parking level, less disturbance, fewer tree impacts. Alma is familiar site.
 - Prior meeting-Alma site preferred by each group
 - Prefer Alma: more green space, closer to train, keep library alone—no additional uses
 - Do not prefer Laurel site—too much parking needed. Trees impact minimal. Parking potentially more costly.
 - Concerned about Laurel and proximity to child care.
 - Concern with safety of child care next to Laurel site.
 - Concerned with Child care near Laurel and lack of sun at Laurel site.
 - Concern with future housing at Alma and impact for future of child care center
 - Alma-no housing could be built there
 - Laurel site: could result in more greenspace?
 - Laurel site: concerned about traffic on Laurel. Laurel will also be a mess with grade separation project on Alma.

Next Steps:

- Meeting notes will be compiled and made available to the public and participants

- City staff is planning to present its recommendations and input from the community to the City Council in March.