



STAFF REPORT

City Council
Meeting Date: 10/9/2018
Staff Report Number: 18-187-CC

Regular Business: **Approve the library needs assessment for the Belle Haven neighborhood and direct staff to begin a space needs assessment for a new Belle Haven branch library**

Recommendation

Staff recommends that City Council consider and approve the following items related to the Library System Improvements project:

1. Finalize and approve the library needs assessment for the Belle Haven neighborhood
2. Direct staff to begin a space needs assessment for a new Belle Haven branch library building
3. Authorize the city manager to execute a contract with Noll and Tam Architects not to exceed \$75,000 for the space needs assessment for a new Belle Haven branch library

Policy Issues

The Belle Haven branch library improvements are part of the City Council's work plan approved February 6, 2018.

Background

At their August 22, 2017 meeting, the City Council established a subcommittee of City Councilmembers Keith and Cline to explore improvements to the City's library system which includes the main library on the Civic Center Campus and the Belle Haven branch library located on the grounds of the Belle Haven School at 413 Ivy Drive. Based on the subcommittee's work and feedback from a number of community members, the subcommittee recommended that the City Council direct staff to take the steps necessary to advance the system improvements project at their October 17, 2017 meeting. The City Council included improvements to the main library and the Belle Haven branch library in the 2018 adopted work plan.

Progress to date for the branch library improvements includes:

- A Belle Haven Neighborhood Library Advisory Committee (BHNLAC) was formed to assist in the library needs assessment in the Belle Haven neighborhood.
- The City Council approved \$140,000 for immediate physical improvements to the branch library, which were completed in January 2018.
- A project page was added to the City's website to consolidate information on the system improvements and provide a channel for community input (Attachment A.)
- The City Council approved the creation of a library system improvements fund, seeded the fund with \$1 million, and increased the city manager's contract authority for matters related to the library systems improvement project. The City Council also authorized a new position to manage the library project (which remains vacant.)
- The City hosted a public South Bay libraries tour of the new Los Gatos library and Palo Alto's new

Mitchell Park library.

- The City hosted a public presentation and a tour of the new Hayward library.

Analysis

The Belle Haven branch library opened in 1999 as a joint-use public and school library located on the grounds of the Belle Haven School at 413 Ivy Drive. The library is operated by the City and the Ravenswood School District under a memorandum of understanding. The library was designed to serve the students of the Belle Haven School during the day and neighborhood residents in the evenings. The branch library replaced a small, public reading room that operated out of the Onetta Harris Community Center. In recent years the branch library was closed to the public during school hours to ensure campus and student security. In 2018 the City Council acted to extend the branch's operating hours to match the open hours of the main library (exclusive of school operating hours.) The branch is now open to the public for 13 additional hours per week, including three weeknights and on the weekend.

The City Council approved service and physical enhancements to the Belle Haven branch library at their October 17, 2017 meeting. Physical upgrades to the library (new carpeting and shelving, new furniture and interior paint, replacement of soiled ceiling tiles and ventilation covers, new window coverings, updated exterior signage, and additional new books and DVDs for the collection) have been completed. The City Council also approved 13 additional open hours per week for the branch library, and an additional 0.50 full time equivalent in staff. The Belle Haven branch library closed for upgrades over the school's winter break and reopened with its new hours in place January 9. As a result of these changes, 81 programs for youth and adults have been held at the branch so far this year, more than were held throughout the entire last fiscal year. Program attendance to date has also increased, already more than doubling attendance from all of last year.

Below is an updated tentative project timeline for the Library System Improvements project for the branch library. A more detailed timeline is included as Attachment C.

- Needs assessment completed
- Space needs study: November 2018 – July 2019
- Schematic designs/ siting decisions/ shared uses: August 2019 – June 2020
- Funding
- Environmental impact report: June 2020 – June 2021
- City Council project approval: July 2021
- Final building design/bid documents: January 2022
- Construction: April 2022– April 2024

Neighborhood library needs assessment

The first step on the path toward a new branch library is to determine the neighborhood's needs. Gensler, the consultants conducting the neighborhood library needs assessment for Belle Haven, began their work in November 2017. As part of their process, Gensler engaged in a discovery process of research and interviews from November 2017 through April 2018. Gensler held design labs and a branch open house April 5 – 7, interviewed staff and community stakeholders, and continued to gather community input through April 28. Research was also done to develop case studies of libraries that are responding to the shifting needs of their communities, and which to identify aspects of their responses might be interesting or applicable to library services in Belle Haven. Through Gensler's research and outreach process, 384 inputs were collected. These included 71 local intercepts and interviews, 44 external surveys and 289 artifacts, worksheets and responses gathered throughout the process.

Gensler identified five key themes that represent the challenges and the opportunities that the Belle Haven branch library faces today:

- The desire for the library to serve as community space first, library second
- Improved and updated library programs and services
- Improved neighborhood services
- Neighborhood belonging and change – a desire by some to feel a greater connection to neighbors and to the City as a whole
- The need to rebrand the branch library as a public place that serves neighborhood residents of all ages

On July 13, 2018, Gensler issued their final neighborhood library needs assessment report (Attachment A.) The report contains a detailed analysis of the needs that emerged during the study, as well as an arrangement of those needs into a priority list of challenges that could be met in the near, mid or long term.

The report's overall findings note that the branch is limited by its perception as a school or children's library, due primarily to its co-location with the Belle Haven School. That co-location provides some advantages – the library is seen as a safe place for students to be after school is out, and its collections and layout are well suited to serving school-aged children – but also presents challenges if the library is to serve all members of the neighborhood.

Belle Haven Neighborhood Library Advisory Committee response

The BHNLAC was formed by City Council action January 16, 2018. The Committee was charged with assisting Gensler throughout the process of their assessment, and has met eight times since February 2018. The Committee has assisted Gensler with their outreach efforts, educated themselves on library best practices, and has taken facilitated tours that focused on the architecture and function of modern libraries. They held a study session with Gensler May 15 and reviewed a draft version of the report. Committee members drafted a short statement in response to the final report in order to meet the deadline for a City Council meeting scheduled for August 21. When that meeting was canceled, BHNLAC had the opportunity to meet as a group to formally develop and finalize a more thorough response.

The Committee offered specific feedback on several areas considered by the needs assessment:

- They expressed concern that Gensler did not connect with several stakeholder groups in the neighborhood, and asked that more outreach be conducted to those groups during the space needs study.
- The Committee asked that the City commit to provide for the short term needs identified in the report while the library system improvements process moves forward.
- The Committee believes that the report should more strongly call out the need for a new branch library separate from the Ravenswood School.
- The Committee recommends that a new branch be located near where neighborhood residents already gather – at the Onetta Harris Community Center.

Despite their concerns, the Committee is fully supportive of moving forward to a space needs study, and recommends to the City Council that they accept the needs assessment and the feedback letter that they have produced (Attachment B.)

Recommended next steps

Staff recommends that the City Council consider and approve the following items related to the Library System Improvements project:

1. Accept the library needs assessment for the Belle Haven neighborhood. The Gensler report is complete,

- Attachment A, and BHNLAC recommends that the City Council accept the report.
2. Direct staff to conduct a space needs study responsive to the findings in the Gensler report. With City Council acceptance of the neighborhood library needs assessment report, the next step is to conduct a space needs assessment for the branch library. Once the space needs assessment is complete, the next step is to identify sites sufficient to accommodate the space needs.
 3. Authorize the City Manager to execute a contract with Noll and Tam Architects in an amount not to exceed \$75,000 for the Belle Haven branch space needs assessment. Staff recommends that the City Council authorize staff to waive the bidding requirement for the space needs study to expedite the study review. Noll & Tam performed the space needs assessment for the main library, is familiar with the library and the City, and has capacity to begin work on the study soon.

Impact on City Resources

The library is requesting funds for the Belle Haven branch library space needs study. These funds would draw from funds previously approved and allocated to the Library System Improvements fund.

Environmental Review

This action is not a project within the meaning of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines §§ 15378 and 15061(b)(3) as it proposes an organizational structure change that will not result in any direct or indirect physical change in the environment.

Public Notice

Public notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with the agenda items being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

Report prepared by:
Nick Szegda, Assistant Library Services Director

Attachments

- A. Belle Haven neighborhood library needs assessment – hyperlink: menlopark.org/mylibrary
- B. Letter of response to the needs assessment from the Belle Haven Neighborhood Library Advisory Committee
- C. Estimated branch project timeline

Dear City Council Members,

The Belle Haven Neighborhood Library Advisory Committee has met, reviewed, and discussed the findings from the Gensler report recently presented to us.

The Gensler report does a good job of re-emphasizing what we already know and have known for a long time--that we need a new, adequate, 21st century library and not a school library moonlighting as a branch library. Please refer to page 29 for details on the community needs identified in this report.

Also, for context, please refer to our interim joint statement included in the staff report for the Aug 21, 2018 City Council meeting: "The Committee feels that the community needs expressed in the report require a new 21st century library in the Belle Haven neighborhood. We look forward to the next part of the process, including the space needs assessment and the library's siting. More specific feedback will be presented in the future."

Below is specific feedback and a few areas our committee would like to highlight as council reviews this report:

1. As acknowledged by Gensler, the needs assessment didn't take in adequate community inputs from some local organizations, service providers, educators, and Belle Haven schools on the gaps in the community and their vision of what a branch library could offer this community. Our recommendation is that when the project moves into the Space Needs Study phase, these stakeholders must be included in the community input phase.
2. The library currently serves as a school library and no matter which way you look at it, the services, programs, and resources offered at the current branch library are woefully inadequate. To fill the gaps identified by the community, and to do justice to the needs identified through the Gensler report (page 29), the library will need a new, 21st century, expanded space. The report surprisingly skirts around this logical recommendation and seems to suggest that enhanced programs could fit in existing space or moderate changes to physical space (see page 31). These suggestions are not based on any type of space analysis so do keep that in mind when you review the report.
3. The BH community needs these resources now, and not 10 years from now. How will the city prioritize short term and long-term expansion of the BH branch library? In other words, what can the city commit to for meeting the shortfalls in the short-term and realizing our dream of a new branch library/community space in the long term? With a new high school opening next year on Jefferson, the demand for teen space will be even higher. During the recent branch library "field trips" all three new libraries cited surprisingly high teen use. The TIDE academy plans to be 9th-12th grades phased in over 4 years. It would be amazing if our community could be ready to meet those needs when that happens.
4. The report makes unsubstantiated claims in a few places e.g., on page 57, a "threat" listed is that "removal of co-location with school could impact ease of use as an after-school safe space." We did not find supporting evidence for those claims. For example, which school programs would be affected if the library moved to a new location? Which programs were being provided by local organizations or the library, and in the event of the library shifting, be impacted negatively in their ease of use? And are we losing more patrons than we gain in its current location?
5. As noted on pg. 12, the relocation of the library was a result of outgrowing its previous location in Onetta Harris Community Center. Its growth seems to have stagnated in the current location for many non-school age users. We believe we should look at moving the books and programs to where the residents are (pg. 20). Looking at the key themes identified in the report on page 18, we would suggest that a branch library connected to the community center could best achieve those goals.

The Gensler report is a detailed analysis of the needs from the community's perspective even with the above noted concerns. It is a guide moving forward...and that's exactly what we need to do: move forward!

We look forward to the next phase of the Belle Haven branch library expansion: a Space Needs Study and clarity on what we can do in the short-term to meet neighborhood needs as we work towards our vision. Two topics that the BHNLAC is discussing currently for the next phase of work are: (i) expanding the members of the BHNLAC to include key stakeholders and community members with specific skill sets (fundraising, marketing, PR etc.), and (ii) creating sub-committees to work on different work streams (fundraising, outreach, strategy, short-term improvements etc.). We will present our proposal to the City Council in the coming months.

Thank you for taking the time to review the report and our additional comments. If we didn't make the point clearly enough through the comments, the BHNLAC is fully supportive of moving this project into the Space Needs/Siting work as soon as possible. The housing increase is already underway - let's get the services ready to meet them.

In summary, here is a list of recommendations from the BHNLAC to the Menlo Park City Council:

1. Accept the Gensler Report as a document assessing the needs of the BH neighborhood for a new, 21st century library, with a motion to emphasize that key stakeholders' inputs be taken during the siting phase
 2. Accept this letter as a summary of feedback from the members of the BHNLAC
 3. Approve the next phase of this project--Space Needs Study
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Sincerely,
Members of the Belle Haven Neighborhood Library Advisory Committee



MEMORANDUM

Date: 9/24/2018
To: Alex D. McIntyre, City Manager; Susan Holmer, Director of Library Services
From: Nick Szegda, Assistant Director of Library Services
Re: Timelines for Library System Improvements project

Branch library timeline (and estimates)

| | |
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| Branch needs assessment begins | Nov-2017 |
| TODAY | |
| Assessment results reported to City Council | Oct-2018 |
| Space needs study begins | Nov-2018 |
| Capital funding campaign planning begins | Nov-2018 |
| Site selection based on space needs results Begins (may be folded into space needs study) | July-2019 |
| City Council site location/use approval | Jan-2020 |
| Building program/site conditions review begins | Feb-2020 |
| Schematic design begins | Feb-2020 |
| Environmental review begins | Jun-2020 |
| Release of draft EIR | Mar-2021 |
| Planning Commission review and Recommendation of final EIR and project | Jun-2021 |
| City Council approval of project | Jul-2021 |
| Final building design/bid documents | Jan-2022 |
| Construction start | Apr-2022 |