

Spring Town Meeting to decide library's future course



Town residents examine a model of the Lynnfield Center area before a presentation last Thursday on the future of the Lynnfield Library by library trustees and the firm William Rawn Associates. (Advocate photo by Bill Laforme)

By Bill Laforme

The Lynnfield Library is likely to look much different a few years from now, assuming that town voters approve a plan to either renovate the existing facility across from the common, or to replace it entirely.

Last Thursday evening, library directors and representatives from William Rawn Associates held a public forum at Lynnfield Middle School to offer residents a chance to provide input on what they would like to see from the library in the future. William Rawn Associates is providing architecture and design services for the library

project. The firm has handled library projects in a number of cities and towns in the region, including Cambridge and East Boston.

The library board will work with the architect on plans for both a renovation and for a new building. From there, the library would present its recommendation to residents for approval at the April, 2016 Town Meeting.

"The reason we're here is really to get your input and ideas," said Russ Boekenkroeger, chairman of the Library Building Committee, to attendees.

If voters were to approve a new library building, it would be located on space currently

occupied by a town-owned garage and by the historic Danforth House, which has fallen into disrepair in recent years but which two centuries ago was home to some of the most important figures in early Lynnfield history.

Kevin Bergeron of William Rawn and Associates suggested that a new library would create a sort of "village green" setting that would complement Lynnfield's longstanding town common, a short distance down the road. Proximity to the schools as well as potential views of the adjoining Reedy Meadow Golf

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LIBRARY | FROM PAGE 5

course were also offered as advantages for a new facility, as well as the prospect of a new and readily accessible public meeting space and as a place where people of all ages could gather or use technology or read.

If a new library is constructed, the existing building would be repurposed by the town in a way to be determined. One thing that could influence the eventual decision is parking – state law apparently would require about 70 additional parking spaces for the library,

and space is not immediately available around the present site.

Another problem the library faces with its current location is occasional flooding in the basement, which has caused damage, including to library materials stored there, in the recent past.

At Thursday night's forum, the fifty or so residents who attended were divided up into four groups, where they could more easily offer their suggestions for the library.

Among the four groups of

residents, the conversation focused on topics ranging from community meeting space to the immediate availability of particular books. Resident Pat Campbell questioned whether the library should have a new building at all.

In a phone conversation on Tuesday, Library Director Nancy Ryan said that residents offered suggestions ranging from small group work spaces and more comfortable seating for adults to separate areas for teens, tweens and children. Residents also reportedly cited the need for more parking, and also talked about creating an enhanced children's room. Many of these thoughts are shared by the library, noted Ryan.

The library director also said that the focus groups once divided up seemed to provide some very different perspectives on the library project. For example, Ryan noted that one of the focus groups was very excited about the prospects for the future library while another seemed undecided and another was very concerned about the costs and tax implications, as well as the use of the site near Reedy Meadow. "We want to be able to respond to their concerns in an appropriate way and with information," said Ryan, adding that residents are welcome to call or email the library to offer thoughts about the project.

William Rawn and Associates will send representatives back to Lynnfield for another public forum with the library board on Thursday, December 10. A handout provided at last week's forum by the firm said that that event would include focus groups for elementary school students and teens. Ryan said that the library will be especially interested to hear insights from the middle school age group.

Additional community input sessions are planned for early January and early March, leading up to the Town Meeting on April 25, 2016.

To learn more about the Lynnfield Library project, visit its website at lynnfieldlibrary.org/library-building-project.

The SHINE Box