

# New library could become town's 'crown jewel'

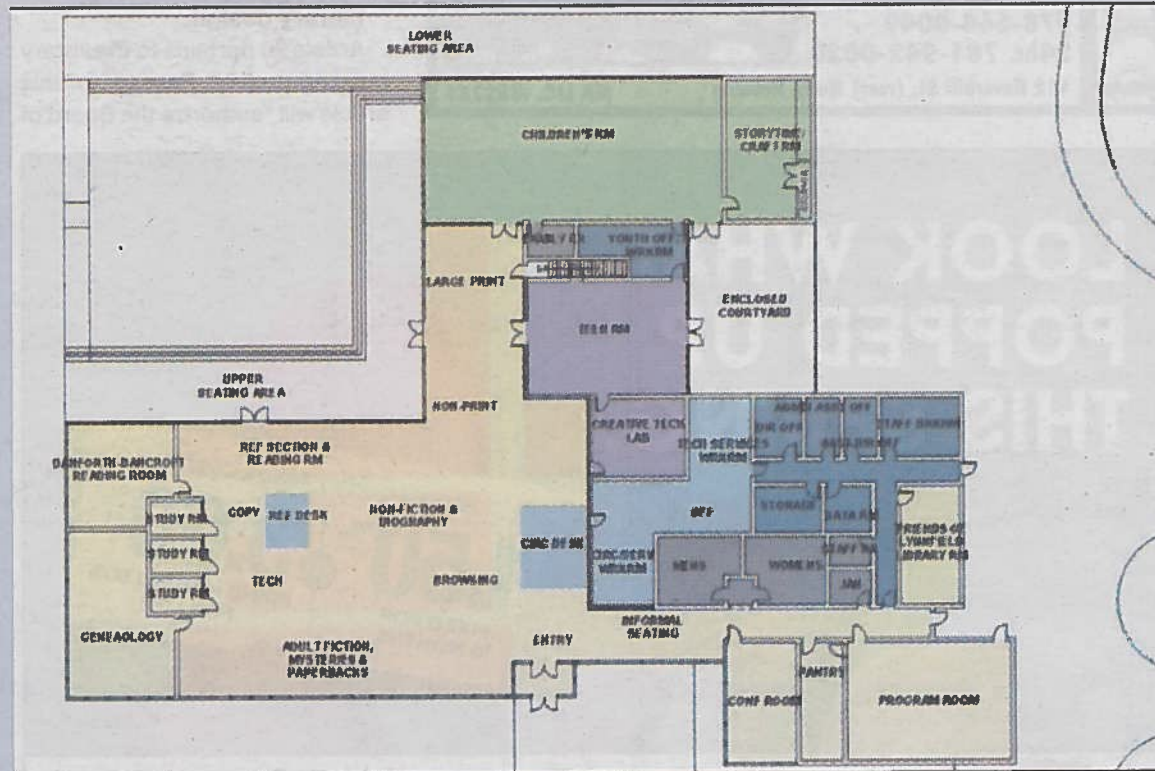
By MAUREEN DOHERTY

LYNNFIELD —The citizens of Lynnfield have a unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to shape a building with a unique standing in a community. Its library.

The public library is the one building in a community that serves all ages — from infants and toddlers to children, teens, college students, adults and senior citizens. And its services and resources are available equally to all, regardless of their economic resources, or lack thereof.

Lynnfield resident Greg Pronevitz is a proponent of the public library system for these reasons and more. And, as the executive director of the Massachusetts Library System — a state funded, not-for-profit that provides services to all libraries in the state, be they public, academic, school, hospital, or museum-based — Pronevitz has first-hand knowl-

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**THE CONCEPTUAL floor plan for a new Lynnfield Public Library proposed at Reedy Meadow, as envisioned by the architectural firm working with the Library Building Committee, William Rawn Associates. (Courtesy Photo)**

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edge of the advantages provided by library facilities that are both practical and stimulate the desire to learn.

At Monday night's annual Town Meeting, Lynnfield voters will be given the opportunity to ensure that the town remains in the queue for future state funding by voting yes on Article 20. Pronevitz hopes the town will vote in favor of this article.

Voting in favor of Article 20 will not "obligate" the town to fund a new library building, but it does allow the town to apply for grants that will support the project in the future, he said. It also ensures that the land at Reedy Meadow would be available to build the library currently being designed for that site by the architectural firm hired by the Library Building Committee. State grants are covering the cost of this design work.

Pronevitz does not work for the organization that awards the grants. Those grants are awarded by the state Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC), which also funds his organization, he said.

Pronevitz says the Massachusetts library system is the envy of the country. Over the past 25 years, over 200 libraries in the state have been upgraded to modern facilities. Now, it's Lynnfield's turn, he believes.

He said in a recent interview with the Villager that it is well-documented that after a library is renovated or a new library is built "circulation statistics also rise dramatically, along with the

number of library cards issued, and the number of programs for people of all ages also rises dramatically," Pronevitz said.

"It is a hugely successful program," Pronevitz said of the library building program run by the MBLC. "It is the envy of other states that Massachusetts has a really good program that ends up with really nice libraries that are future-ready. And for 25 years Massachusetts governors and legislatures have all supported this funding because it is a real nice win-win for every community," he said. This support cuts across party lines.

"It creates economic development with construction projects and the procurements surrounding the building project," he said, adding that once construction is completed these new buildings become "community centers, cultural centers and very successful libraries."

Statistics for some neighboring libraries, including Wakefield, Newbury, Middleton and Topsfield, reviewed by Pronevitz revealed that annual attendance at each of these libraries "doubled or nearly doubled" after construction projects were completed.

"We have an opportunity here now to improve the Lynnfield infrastructure in a way that we've been improving our infrastructure for years. We've done a lot of important projects that have benefited the town and it is now time to build a new library," he said, noting the well-documented de-

ficiencies of the current building.

"I'm really excited about the new location. It's in a scenic part of town that we don't usually get to enjoy. Now that nice view of the Reedy Meadow will be available to everyone. The library will have both indoor spaces that overlook the meadow as well as outdoor spaces. It can be the crown jewel of Lynnfield by providing community space for all. It can become a cultural center for all as well as a place for education and economic development and lifelong learning," he believes.

Not all societies provide the access to knowledge that the public library system in the United States provides to its citizens.

Lynnfield residents Victor and Janine Saldanha understand this first-hand. When both were growing up in Bombay, India, now known as Mumbai, they frequented "subscription" libraries. Janine went to the Sir David Sassoon Library, where her mother was a Trustee, while Victor frequented the U.S. Information Services (USIS) library.

They were both attracted to the libraries because of their "beckoning exteriors and comfortable interiors, and the wealth of knowledge found within." The USIS library, built in the 1900s, was a bright, airy welcoming place while the David Sassoon Library, built in the 1800s in the classic style of that time, had "a wonderful reading room," Janine said.

Residents of Lynnfield since 1975, the Saldanhas believe the free public library system in the U.S. "should be nurtured and treasured." They attended all three community forum presentations, viewed the model of the proposed new library in Reedy Meadow, and hope the townspeople support the proposal being made.

Pronevitz said public libraries are "slowly moving into the electronic age, but are doing so more slowly than K-12 or colleges."

"Most of the electronic resources that are available in the library are available from home," he said, but there remains a true

benefit to visiting a physical building – the ability to connect with a librarian who can assist patrons in accessing appropriate tools or providing materials and resources from other libraries which the patron may not be aware of.

"Folks wonder isn't the library obsolete because of the Internet," he said. Pronevitz does not believe this to be true because only about half of the material on the Internet is free.

"The half that is vetted and of the highest quality is behind a paywall. The library breaks down that paywall. You just go right through it for library patrons for the materials that they subscribe to," Pronevitz said.

"A new library building expands use of the library in all measurable ways. Students who might not use it now will become more aware of it. We really hope teens will become more aware of and take advantage of a special space we are building for them," he said.