

Sherman Library Building Project Q&A

As previously reported, on Wednesday February 8, a petition was brought to the First Selectman's office. The petition requests a town meeting to address rescinding the town's \$1 million grant for our library expansion project. A referendum vote is scheduled for March 3.

There were 20 signatures on the petition, enough to put this process in motion.

We understand that there is a feeling of uncertainty about the library project stemming from several factors, including the downturn in the economy, the impact of evolving information technology on the future use of libraries, plus the problems and delays that have occurred during the Sherman Firehouse rebuilding project.

The Library Board strongly believes the library building project is viable and will serve the town of Sherman well. In light of the upcoming town meeting and town referendum on the library project, we want to take this opportunity to clarify some of the issues surrounding the Sherman Library Association building project and have prepared the following questions and answers to address them.

Facts about the Library Building Project:

Q Who owns the Sherman Library?

A: The Sherman Library is owned and operated by the Sherman Library Association, a non-profit 501(c)(3) association library, established in 1925. It is a community resource, freely available to all. The library is officially designated as Sherman's public library and receives a portion of its operating budget from an annual town grant.

Q. Will our taxes go up due to this project?

A. Yes, but only a small amount. Due to the issuance of 20-year bonds we believe this to be approximately \$30 per household per year (house valued at \$400,000).

Q. Is the Sherman Library building project way over budget?

A. No. The library is currently awaiting a final budget number for revised library plans. As was reviewed at the last Board of Selectman meeting, the addition has been scaled back by 2,200 square feet, making it 4,040 square feet, bringing the total size to 9,706 square feet. This includes barn and original library (the current size with lower level is 4,691sq ft.) The Library Board requested this after construction budget numbers came in considerably higher than expected.

The new construction budget also includes a 15% contingency funding reserve to cover any construction cost overruns. The State of Connecticut has approved all the revisions in the plans, which need to follow specific guidelines in order to meet eligibility requirements for the state's commitment to provide a \$1 million construction grant. To downsize the addition anymore will affect those grant requirements.

Q. Is the town responsible for providing more funds if the library building project does go over budget?

A. No. The library owns its land and existing building and has purchased adjacent land for the expansion with its own funds. The town has no obligation to fund the library project beyond its commitment for a \$1 million grant. The library board has voted and agreed upon a maximum price it can afford.

The library has hired an experienced construction manager, Enfield Builders, to supervise the project, control costs and provide an agreed upon maximum price for the project. The building design is by renowned library architectural firm, Tuthill and Wells.

Q. Does the grant agreement between the town and library have conditions to protect the town?

A. Yes. The library grant agreement with the town is completed and ready to be signed by the town. It includes a timeline for completion and a stipulation that should the expanded and renovated library fail to open on time the library must repay the town grant.

Q. After completion of the building project will the library's operating expenses go up and will the town be responsible for those costs?

A. The library's operating expenses are expected to go up slightly following completion of the project and the library is in the process of finalizing estimates of exactly how much.

The library receives an annual grant from the town to help cover operating costs, but is responsible for remaining costs. The library covers these costs through fundraising events, private donations, membership appeals and other grants. In addition, a portion of an unrestricted library financial reserve fund will be set aside as an endowment to cover any additional operating costs, as needed.

Q. What portion of the project funding has the town committed to?

A. The town approved a \$1 million grant for construction costs. The library is responsible for all additional funding for the \$3.6 million project; this includes purchase of adjacent land.

Q. What will happen to the library building project should the town grant money be rescinded?

A. This building project has been in the works for many years. The library has raised over \$3 million for the project, including the town grant. It is in the final phase of fundraising. Many years of careful planning and financial support have been dedicated to this project. Losing the \$1 million town grant will jeopardize the \$1 million state construction grant, a \$200,000 STEAP grant for the renovation of the barn, and hundreds of thousands of additional grants and private donations.

Replacing this funding from other sources would be a daunting prospect. Major private financial commitments and investments have already been made to this project. The Library has expended funds in good faith with the understanding that the Town would honor its grant agreement. To renegotiate on that commitment now would make it difficult for the library to move forward with regards to monies already spent and donations received from civic-minded people seeking to make the new library a reality.

Q. Libraries are changing with all the new technologies. Is this a good time to expand the Sherman Library?

A. Yes. The Sherman expansion is partly the result of the expanding role of the library in the community. Most observers agree libraries are a vital and thriving part of communities across the nation and will continue to be in the future. They remain a place where intellectual curiosity can be satisfied in a friendly, comfortable environment. It is a free and open gathering place for local residents to seek out information, acquire knowledge and a center for community programs and group activities.

The renovated, restored and expanded Sherman Library will do all of this while faithfully preserving, upgrading and repurposing a historic landmark in our town.

The Sherman Library Board strongly encourages people to stop in and see the revised plans for the new Sherman Library; talk to library director Millie Loeb or email the board at [SLBOARD @biblio.org](mailto:SLBOARD@biblio.org). Attend the Town meeting on Friday, February 24, 7:00 PM at the Sherman School! And vote on March 3rd!