

HIGH PLAINS LIBRARY DISTRICT

BOARD OF TRUSTEES COMMUNICATION

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| Meeting date: October 16, 2017 |
| Type of item: Information or Action |
| Subject : Lincoln Park options |
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Purpose of document

In several Board meetings, most recently September 18, the Board has expressed concern about what action, if any, is needed with regard to the current Lincoln Park facility, located at 1012 11th Street, Greeley. The District has been leasing this building. The building, usually referred to as "the Goodwill building" has been on the market for several months. As a result, the District has only been able to lease the facility on a month-to-month basis. Were the building sold, one possible outcome would be that the District would need to immediately vacate the building. This report provides some background on recent past history of the facility, identifies issues to consider relating to the present situation, suggests possible options, and puts forth a recommendation from staff for the Board's consideration.

Background

Prior to the founding of the District, what we call "the Lincoln Park Library" was the Greeley Public Library. It was four blocks north of the current site, at 919 7th Street, adjacent to Lincoln Park. It was owned by the City of Greeley. The City leased the facility to the District for \$1/year. What prompted the move to the current location is that the site was sold in January 2016, and the District was notified that it needed to vacate by June 2016. The building was demolished to make way for the construction of the Doubletree by Hilton Hotel.

The former location was 14,000 square feet, and the facility housed a collection of 35,000 items. The current location is 6,195 square feet (7,084 square feet if the space formerly occupied by Goodwill is included), with a collection of 12,000. This is a significant fact, because the current location is about a fourth of the desired building size of 24,000.

The current location at 11th Street was owned by Goodwill Industries and used as a career training center. Initially, the library and Goodwill jointly shared the space. Earlier this year, Goodwill vacated the space and the building was put up for sale.

Considerations

Unsettled situation. As noted above, the most significant consideration is that the library is in an unsettled situation. With a month-to-month lease, it could be necessary to vacate the space with little notice. This produces a certain amount of tension, and even if the decision is to wait and see what happens, some would say that a planned response from the Board is needed.

Temporary or permanent. The move to the current location was intended as a temporary solution, prompted by action outside of District control. Others may see the current location as a suitable permanent site. This is significant, because it can affect one's view of the options. For example, if this is the permanent location, the option to purchase gains traction. If the location is temporary, purchasing may be a less desirable option.

Asking price. According to Matthew deBartolomeis, realtor for the site, the asking price is \$675,000. He indicated that there has not been an appraisal done on the building since Goodwill has owned it.

No immediate alternatives. There are properties for sale in the area, and some of these properties were presented to the Board at the July 24 board meeting. However, nothing thus far has presented itself as compelling enough to take action now. Second, efforts at finding another facility has been for the most part passive, with one exception noted below. Some have suggested a more aggressive strategy is needed, such as hiring a commercial realtor. Third, it has not been determined by the current Board as to what to look for: is it an existing facility that could be remodeled, is it property that could be used to build a new facility, is it a location to be shared, is it another lease?

City of Greeley's direction. In nearly any discussion of the Lincoln Park situation, the City of Greeley comes up. This is mainly for two reasons: (1) the City as a potential buyer of the current Lincoln Park facility and leasing it to the District; (2) the current Greeley City Hall as a permanent location for the Lincoln Park Library.

Potential buyer. The City of Greeley owns or leases several facilities in the downtown area. According to Assistant City Manager Becky Safarik, it is not unusual for the City to partner with other agencies on facility needs, or to make facility trades. The thought is that if the City purchased the building, it would lease to the District so that the Lincoln Park could continue to function as it has. The City has considered purchasing the Goodwill building but regards the asking price as too high.

Greeley Town Hall. In December 2015, the District released a program plan for Lincoln Park, developed by District staff, Board and other stakeholders. The purpose was to identify what was needed in a facility. In July 2016, the architectural firm of Hord, Coplan and Macht released a "Historic Structure Assessment and Preservation Plan" of the Greeley City Hall. The purpose, as the title implies, was to assess it as a historic building; it was built in 1968. In February 2016, that same architectural firm released a "Preliminary Feasibility Report for using the existing Greeley City Hall as a Public Library." This document brought together the program plan for Lincoln Park with the City Hall facility. The document identified several things that would need correction, but their conclusion was that the "Greeley City Hall Building is suitable for reuse as a public library."

What has deterred movement in that direction is timing. The City is currently in Phase 1 of their building plan, but they are unable to relocate all of their staff from the Greeley City Hall. To complete Phase 2, which would allow the construction of new facilities, would require voters to approve the extension of a "Quality of Life" sales tax. The earliest that vote could occur is in November 2018. All things considered, if the District purchased the building, it would not be available for occupancy until the end of 2020. In addition, the current District Board has voiced some concerns with the building that they would like addressed to their satisfaction. Thus the City of Greeley's direction is a consideration, but even if the Greeley Town Hall is the solution, it does not address the immediate need at Lincoln Park.

Downtown presence. One assumption in the discussion of a facility is that it is necessary to maintain a library in the downtown area. This is supported nationally. It is rare for a city to not have a library in its downtown area. It is also supported locally. Safarik shared information about the Greeley Creative District in the downtown area. The library is seen as a logical and vital participant in building that creative center in the community through its programs and services. On the other hand, the Lincoln Park library is within minutes of the Centennial Park Library and the Riverside Library in Evans, so some would say that a third library is not necessary. In reply, it needs to be considered that Centennial Park already has a significant amount of traffic, and how Riverside is geographically situated impacts the likelihood of residents in the downtown area traveling to that location. Also, whether a small town or big city, people tend to identify with an area within a short distance of where they live.

Use. Since moving from the 7th Street to the 11th Street location, circulation, gate count and number of active borrowers have decreased by half. One would expect this since building size has been reduced to half of what it was, and the collection is a third of what it was in the former location. Another possible reason is that the current location does not stand out, despite huge signs identifying it as a library. In addition, the

parking lot is very small, and is shared with an adjacent liquor store. Some may see it as unattractive. The significance is that if the goal is to increase patron use, size and location of the facility are important.

Size of facility. The program plan from December 2015 called for a 24,000 square foot building and a collection size of 100,000. According to the Facilities Master Plan, that falls within the range of a large full service branch. A major consideration in sizing of libraries is economy of scale: it requires the same level of staffing in a 10,000 square foot facility as a 20,000 square foot facility. The point is that small sized libraries increases the demands for staffing.

What should drive location. The location of libraries is often influenced by political considerations. That's inevitable and sometimes even necessary, as a library or a District needs to operate in a symbiotic environment with other government entities. Some would say, however, that what sometimes gets lost in that equation is the library user: the first and foremost consideration in location is what best serves the residents, and what types of materials and services best suit the needs and wants of those residents.

Options

Relocate staff. The strategy here would be to continue with the month-to-month lease. If the building is sold, the staff and collection would be redistributed to other locations until a more permanent opportunity presented itself. The advantage of this approach is that it could be an opportunity. Recently the District reorganized in order to increase its level of outreach. One of the frequently heard concerns is that the potential for outreach in the District is great, but the staffing levels curtail what can be provided. If all of the branch staff, including those at Lincoln Park, were pooled, staff could be rotated to extend the level of outreach throughout the District. This would also have the effect of acquainting branch staff with the expanses and variety of communities in the District. It could also help in unifying members and branches. The disadvantage in this approach is that it would remove the presence of the library from downtown.

Buy the Goodwill building. The District's Facilities Master Plan states a preference for owning the property and facility. This option would abide by that preference. A possible disadvantage would be that it would become more likely that what was intended as a temporary option would become permanent. Another disadvantage is that it ties up funds. Those funds might be recovered when the building is sold. But, it is possible as with any investment that the facility and property cannot be easily sold, or would be sold at a loss. A third disadvantage is that the asking price may be a concern, as noted by the City of Greeley.

Actively seek property for a new construction. The key word here is property. Generally speaking, the preference is to build a library from the ground up. The obvious reason is that this allows for a design that meets the needs of a library. It also ensures that the facility meets current codes. The disadvantage is the cost of new construction.

Actively seek to purchase an existing facility. The purchase of the Greeley City Hall would be an example of this option. An advantage of this option is that it recycles. A related advantage is that if the building is of a certain age, it preserves historic or iconic buildings, which is generally seen by communities as a positive. Qualifying as a historic building also opens up the possibilities for grants to offset costs. The main disadvantage of any existing facility -- which is seen even in remodels of existing *libraries* -- is that it may not allow for features that would be desirable if the structure were built from the ground up. Further, if it is a historic structure, there can be other limits required to preserve the historical features. Another disadvantage is that an existing building can be expensive to remodel or to bring up to current code. However, it is sometimes the case that the bottom line costs of renovation turns out to be less than the purchase of property and new construction.

Actively seek another leasing opportunity. It is not a preference to lease a facility, according to the Facilities Master Plan, but it is acknowledged as an option. The advantage of leasing is that it allows the District to

continue service while looking for a permanent facility. There can also be an advantage if the lease is like that the City had with the District in its former facility -- \$1/year. In that case the presence of a downtown library was seen as important enough to justify the low lease. The disadvantage of a lease is apparent in the current situation: the lack of control by the District that can result in having to find a new facility on short notice, which is escalated when the options for an alternative facility are limited. It should be noted that deBartolomeis, the realtor, indicated that he has had interest from a client who might be willing to lease the facility for 5-10 years.

Joint purchase. If the issue in purchasing is that the asking price is seen as too high by the City and District, one option would be to partner with entities such as the City of Greeley or the Downtown Development Authority to purchase the facility, but maintain it as a library. This is mentioned with the caveat that this would be a high-risk option if only one party wanted to sell later, so a clearly-defined exit plan for all parties would be needed. The advantage is that it would maintain the library presence in the downtown area.

Actively seek a joint use opportunity. The difference between this option and a joint purchase is that here the District and another entity would use the facility. An example would be the Riverside Library in Evans, where the building is jointly owned by the District and Evans. It is similar to when the Library and Goodwill shared the space with the difference that Goodwill is the sole owner. This is an option in the Facilities Master Plan: "The High Plains Library District will actively pursue co-location when such an opportunity is the most efficient and effective way to provide library service." The advantage here is that it does allow for the sharing of costs. The disadvantage is that there is less control.

Staff recommendation

The role of staff is to provide the Board with all of the information they need to allow them to make the best decision. Typically, part of that information includes a recommendation from staff. Within that context, the recommendation of staff is a strategy that is both passive and active:

Passive.

Continue at the current facility. If the building is sold, staff and collections would be redistributed to assist in other locations.

Active.

- (1) Begin making plans for how staff and collection would best be distributed;
- (2) Move quickly to build the storage facility, budgeted in 2018, as one source for the Lincoln Park collection if needed;
- (3) Using the Facilities Master Plan and the December 2015 program plan, staff would work with the Board to identify the features they would want in a permanent facility;
- (4) Hire a commercial realtor to actively explore possible buildings or property for purchase. This would also allow the current Board to explore to their satisfaction the viability of the current Greeley City Hall as a future location.

These recommendations make the following assumptions:

- (1) that the current facility is viewed as temporary;
- (2) that there is a willingness to be without a downtown library for a period of time, but that the long-term commitment is to a downtown presence;
- (3) that the current asking price is too high;
- (4) that the building is not selling at a time when activity is high could be an indicator that if purchased, it might be difficult to sell later.