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Library board unveils expansion, renovation plans

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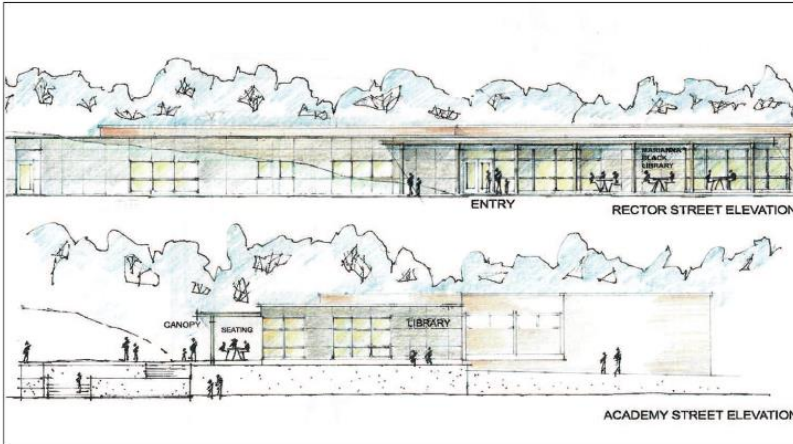
With around 50 supporters in the crowd, Ellen Snodgrass, chairwoman of Marianna Black Library Board, presented the expansion and renovation plans for the current library in Bryson City before Swain County Board of Commissioners on Thursday, Feb. 24.

She called the 15-page document on the plans a "case for support."

"We want to make it clear that the goal of this renovation and expansion is not to add more books. We're adding more services," she said. "We're taking a user-centered approach focusing specifically on how patrons use this library."

Both current patrons and community members who don't currently use the library were surveyed for input, she said.

After years of exploring grander options, including a new building on property that had been donated for such a purpose, the library is now proposing using the half-acre



The drawing shows plans to expand and renovate the current Marianna Black Library. The goal is for a welcoming exterior with a covered area and lots of windows.

Architectural drawings by Keith Hargrave of Asheville, image courtesy of Marianna Black Library Board

property of the current building that was built in 1970 to better meet the needs of today's library patrons.

In the plans

The focus, as Snodgrass said, is a user-centered design approach. To do so, the renovated space would include:

- A designated space for teens
- Career and tech center or computer lab (a flexible space for computer classes user groups, individual training, STEM, help with resumes, and the 3D printer and digital converting devices would be there)
- Small group rooms for

meetings (Snodgrass noted this is the most popular service in libraries across the country today)

- Improved community room that would have access to restrooms and include a kitchen and have after-hours access (storage would be separate)

- Carolina room with regional content and space for groups of 6-8 people

- Larger children's area
- Increased parking (additional 10 new spaces on Rector Street)

- A drive-up book drop
- A small, covered area outside for after-hours internet access

The expansion will be on the front of the current building toward Rector and Academy Streets (where the current portico and entry is), as well as an expanded area toward the back.

"The expansion is slightly lower than the current building paying respect to the old building," Snodgrass said, showing the architectural drawing of the

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Library : Commissioners seem agreeable to the plans

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entrance. "There will be lots of windows on both Rector and Academy sides."

The goal, she said, is a welcoming building. Inside, safety and accessibility are both prioritized. The meeting rooms have glass walls and there is a line of sight from the circulation desk across all the spaces. The entrance is more ADA accessible and the plans include a children's restroom in the children area.

The funding

The funding objective, as outlined by the library campaign planning committee, is for the 16,470 square-foot library and Fontana Regional headquarters, with the project total estimated at \$4.25 million.

The library's aim is for funding to be as follows: \$2.5 from government, \$1 million from civic groups and bequests, and \$750,000 from business and foundations gifts and grants.

Snodgrass was quick to say the library doesn't expect Swain County to fund the entire \$2.5 million. "It could be state appropriations, federal money," she said, adding there are some federal bills right now that might help fund library services.

"It could also be in-kind services," she said.

To that, the board's ears seemed to perk up.

Commission Chairman Ben Bushyhead sought more information on in-kind services and was assured the library board has been in discussions with County Manager Kevin King and Grounds Manager Bobby Jenkins but nothing has been determined. It would depend on the interest of the commissioners, Snodgrass said.

To begin with, King noted the county has plans to work on the retaining wall and property, as well as installing a new roof and HVAC for the current building. He hopes it will help set the stage for a new addition.

He said they've also talked about how the county workers might do more when construc-

tion begins.

"With engineering and construction management with our group, it could set the stage for our crew," he said.

Of course, the other piece would be the funding for the materials, he said.

Snodgrass noted the campaign committee currently has \$400,000 in its budget primarily raised from large individual donations. For this project alone, the campaign has paid for surveys, presentations, a feasibility study, TOPO survey, civil engineering, site development plans and architectural work.

"We also invested in fundraising software and plan to hire a grantwriter and have professional fundraising training," she said. "We feel we are more prepared than we have ever been. We're ready to partner with you, hopefully, to give Swain County the library it deserves."

There's also more confidence in the availability of state and federal funds, which has been a stumbling block in the past.

"Throughout the years, it seemed like capital money had dried up a lot, but with the pandemic a lot of money is flowing right now. So, it would be an opportune time to have a grant writer," King said.

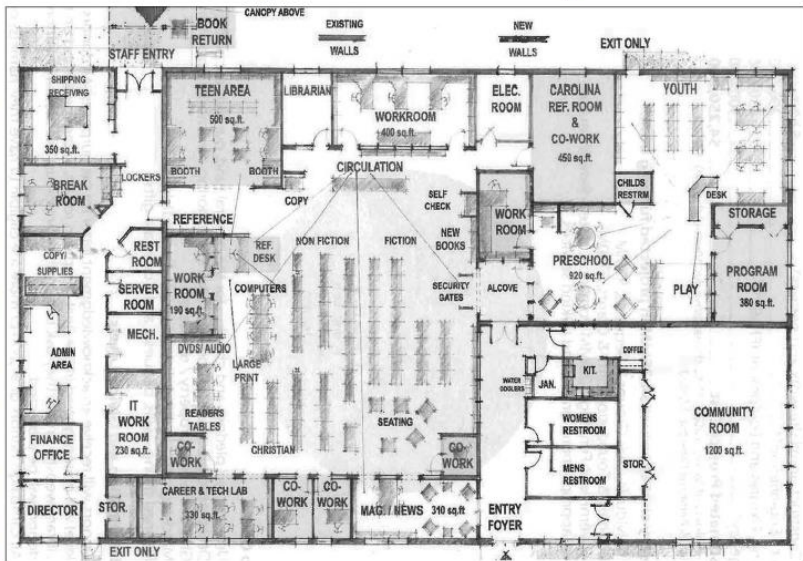
Unlike in previous presentations for library plans, the commissioners gave these plans a warm welcome and seem to be on board with working together.

Commissioner Kenneth Parton asked what the commissioners can do?

Commissioner Danny Burns, who has served as the liaison with the library board for years now, clarified what they are seeking.

"I think what really they want is a commitment from the board. They've been working for years now to really commit to be a part of this project to make this library happen," he said. "I don't think they've had that in the past."

"They never had it in the past because we were talking about a brand new building," Bushyhead said, adding that this project is different and more feasible.



The drawing shows the interior design for an expanded and renovated Marianna Black Library, with the shaded areas showing new services, which include an area for teens, a career and technical lab, as well as co-work small rooms.

Architectural drawings by Keith Hargrave of Asheville, image courtesy of Marianna Black Library Board

"I think we're on board. We've been trying to do things now," Bushyhead added.

Snodgrass thanked Burns for his commitment and serving on the board and for all of the supporters.

Clapping broke out after the discussion, as members of the crowd showed they were pleased that the commissioners seem to be in support of the expansion and renovation of the library.

Later in the meeting, during public comment, the board heard from a local resident on the library. Julie Richards said she was encouraged to see the board is in support of the library. She asked the board to make a funding commitment to the project and a public verbal statement in support. Such a gesture would help show Swain County is committed to the project and would help in building momentum for fundraising, she said.

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