

**PLEASE READ:
REGARDING THE
WATCHUNG LIBRARY / COMMUNITY CENTER**

October, 2012

To the Residents of Watchung Borough:

On the ballot on November 6, 2012 the residents of the Borough of Watchung will have the opportunity to vote on a non-binding referendum regarding the potential construction of a Watchung Borough Library and Community Center. This mailing has been written by a group of volunteers – and fellow taxpayers – who serve on the Watchung Library Study Committee; the Committee would like to inform you on the Committee’s work and to provide answers to frequently asked questions about the construction of a new library and community center in Watchung.

Several years ago the Library Study Committee was established to review the current state of the Library, research the future of community libraries, solicit public input, identify and assess alternatives, and to provide recommendations on what to do with the Library.

If you are not already aware, the Watchung Library today is a converted home, a structure that was never built to be a public library. Efforts to modernize the Library would require a significant financial investment (hundreds of thousands of dollars) to rebuild. Even if these repairs were to be made, the Library neither has the size nor the facilities to meet the numerous and diverse requirements of today’s libraries, which often serve a dual purpose as community centers. Without a “center of town” the Library is looked at to serve this purpose (over).

The following statistics were provided by the Somerset County Library. Did you know that in 2011:

- Watchung residents borrowed **85,000** items – about **30** per person; the national and New Jersey average is between **5** and **6** per person;
- The Watchung Library is the **second smallest** library building in Somerset County;
- The Watchung Library has the **highest** circulation per square foot of any Somerset County branch;
- If Watchung Library patrons **purchased** what was borrowed, the cost to the patrons would be:
 - \$423,500 buying books for teens and adults
 - \$215,400 buying children's books
 - \$548,100 buying DVDs
 - \$140,700 buying CDs
- Over 5,000 children attended free programs.

Even in a struggling economy, Watchung has an opportunity to construct a library and community center, one which the Committee believes has a very strong return on investment for Watchung. After researching and visiting many libraries, understanding the cost of new library construction, interviewing numerous architects, and commissioning an architect/engineering firm to provide a preliminary design, the Borough has an opportunity to take advantage of severely depressed construction prices to build a much-needed library and community center at an affordable price.

The Committee recommends that the building be paid for through a combination of taxpayer dollars, substantial private (individual and corporate) donations, grant-writing, and other funds.

Enclosed is a list of frequently asked questions and answers.

Also enclosed are some preliminary designs for a new library and community center. Please take the time to review this material. Additional detail is available through the following link:

www.watchungnj.com

Please vote on November 6th.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Members of the Watchung Library Study Committee

A NEW LIBRARY AND COMMUNITY CENTER FOR WATCHUNG

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The Watchung Library Study Committee recognizes that a highly educated, upper-middle class community such as Watchung should have a library that is a convenient center of community life, capable of providing the current and emerging resources, programs and innovative services for Borough residents.

What features does the design of the new library and community center have that currently do not exist?

- Accessibility for the handicapped, including access to the elevator at both the front and rear of the building.
- Expanded space to support current and emerging library services and collections.
- Dividable conference rooms to hold up to 150 people for community programs/meetings.
- Smaller tutor/study rooms for individual and small group use.
- Current computer technology (PCs, interconnectivity, internet) and associated services and materials.
- A cafe area where beverages and light foods can be served.
- Open space to sit and read books, periodicals, etc.
- “Flexible” (movable) space which provides flexibility in how space is used, in order to meet the evolving needs of the community.

What are the reasons for a new library and community center?

The current library has limitations. The library is a converted home, and was not a structure built for public use; it does not meet many of the use requirements of both a public building and a library. Repairing the existing structure would not permit the library to functioning optimally, and it would not offer many of the benefits a new library and community center would provide.

What is being proposed for a new library?

The Watchung Library Study Committee and the architects have proposed the reconstruction of the Library, proposing to gut the current structure and construct an addition.

What if nothing is done?

The town, over the last decade, has spent tens of thousands of dollars trying to maintain the current Library (e.g., new roof, rotted siding replacement, painting, HVAC). Despite these efforts, the structure continues to show deterioration. It is a matter of time before other substantial additional renovations will be required. At that time either the town would have to invest substantial funding to make the Library compliant or the library would have to be closed until upgrades are made.

What does it mean to have the structure serve as a “community center” as well as a library?

The role of the public library is changing. The Committee researched how public libraries are “transforming” to meet the needs of the community beyond the traditional library. Especially in the case of towns like Watchung where there is no “town center”, the library acts as a gathering place for the community; a place where parents, children, senior citizens, and volunteers can gather; a

facility that can meet the space, technology, information, knowledge, and social needs of its community.

What is the size of the current library and what is the size of the proposed library and community center?

The existing Library is approximately 8,000 square feet, of which approximately 4,000 square feet is usable space (staircase, fireplace, part of second floor, and attic are not usable space.) The new library will be approximately 17,000 square feet; actual “usable” space will be approximately 8,000 square feet. The new library requires space for multiple entries/exits, handicapped services (elevator, bigger bathrooms), additional bathrooms, and a large 1,600 square foot dividable conference area.

How much does a new library and community center cost?

Foreman Architects-Engineers, who performed the preliminary design for a new library, estimate that the current cost to renovate and expand the structure, to meet the needs of a library and community center, would cost \$4.2 million, including all furnishings.

How will this new library/community center be funded?

The Committee considered the cost of a new library and community center, and sought an architect that would work to design a library with the taxpayer’s wallet in mind. Every effort was made to design a library that is **functional, future-oriented, flexible and adaptive to change**. The Committee recommends that the building be paid for through a combination of taxpayer dollars, substantial private (individual and corporate) donations, grant-writing, and other funds.

What did the Library Study Committee learn from the hiring process and how is Foreman Architects-Engineers meeting the needs of Watchung?

The Committee reviewed and learned from the proposals, ideas, and innovations of twelve architects which responded to the RFP. The Committee selected six architects for further evaluation, and visited a number of libraries built by the architects. After more interviews, Foreman Architects was selected.

Foreman Architects met a multitude of times with the Committee. Foreman Architects-Engineers met with the Watchung Library staff, with Warren Library staff, and with Watchung Borough engineers, to understand both the current situation and the future needs of a library and community center in Watchung. Foreman Architects-Engineers worked to understand the flow of the library, the positioning of specific sections, the size of specific areas, and have designed a floor plan to meet those needs. Foreman Architects-Engineers also participated in a public forum this past June.

Has a change in physical location of the library been considered? Was the Ness property on Mountain Boulevard considered?

Yes to both. The Committee, working with the Mayor, Council and Administrators, considered a number of other locations on Borough owned property. The current location is in the center of Borough activities, and was considered the best option. There was a great deal of discussion about the potential use of the Ness property. The Mayor and Council, along with many taxpayers, believe that the Ness property should be dedicated to providing greater open space and greater access to recreation (trails, open fields, ball fields).

Will the library be closed while work is being completed?

It will be difficult to keep the Library open while it is under construction. The need for a staging area, large equipment access to the front and rear of the building, additional provisions required to ensure the safety of Library patrons, and access to the whole building when making fundamental structural changes, all indicate a need to close the building while under construction.

What would library patrons do in the interim while the library is unavailable?

Some programs will be held at the Arts Center but most will be greatly curtailed or put on hold; books, CDs, and DVDs would be available at other Somerset County libraries, e.g., Warren. The Somerset County Library System website could still be used to order books for pick up at any branch of the Somerset County Library System.

Are libraries part of the future of communities?

Yes. The Committee believes that libraries continue to be used as a source of knowledge and information. Increasingly, librarians are being sought after to provide credible sources of internet information. Libraries are a source of technology resources (wireless connections, internet connectivity, and PC availability). Libraries are increasingly being used to provide technology support and access to training. There continues to be great demand for programs which libraries offer to children, teens, and young adults. The demand for adult programs (book clubs, senior meetings) grows, only constrained by current space limitations in Watchung. The library is an established place where various groups can meet.

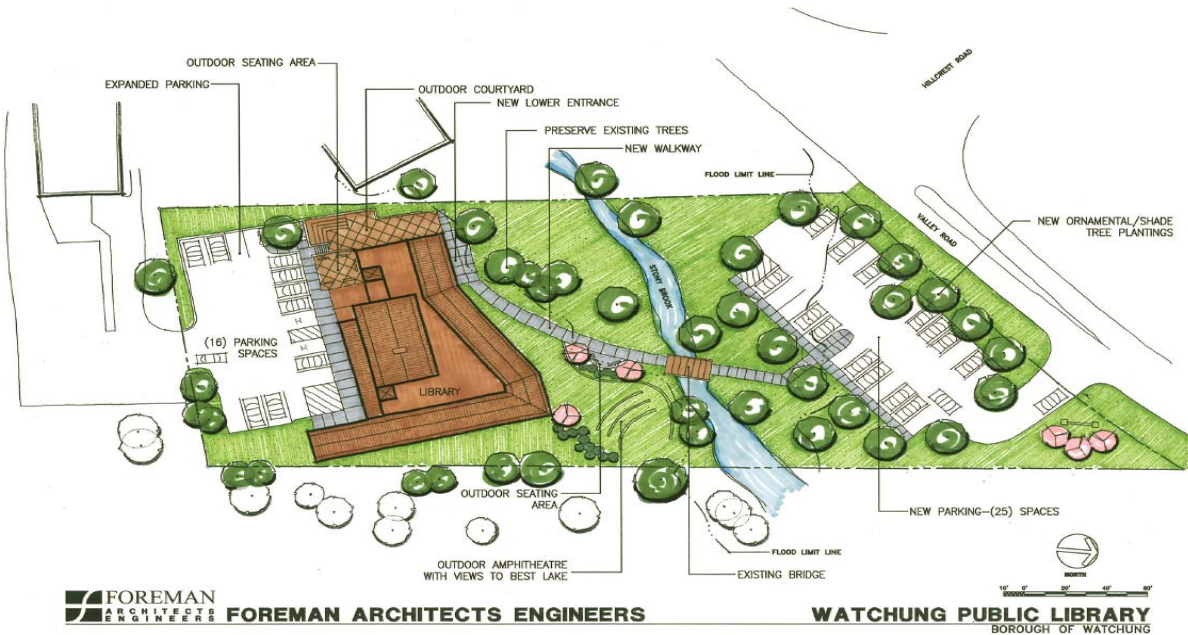
Is this a good time to build a library?

While the slow economy has many negative aspects, one positive is that the cost of building libraries has not increased. The cost of copper, HVAC equipment, plumbing and electrical has increased or stayed the same, but the overall cost of construction has decreased. This will continue until the economy rebounds. It appears that the prices for construction have actually decreased or stayed the same over the last three years.

What are the next steps?

The Mayor and Council have included a non-binding referendum on the **November 6, 2012** General Election ballot. The Borough residents will have an opportunity to voice their position in support or against a new library. The interpretive statement outlines how the library will be funded. “Non-binding”, means that the Mayor and Council may take action based on the outcome of this vote. A “YES” vote supports building a new library and community center. A “NO” vote does not support building a new library and community center.

Survey of New Library and Community Center and Related Area:



Front Rendering of New Watchung Library and Community Center:



Rear Rendering of New Watchung Library and Community Center:



Depiction of Circulation Desk of New Watchung Library and Community Center:



Depiction of Reading Area of New Library and Community Center:



Depiction of Children’s Area and Passage to Library Café:

