

ALEXANDER MITCHELL LIBRARY  
FACILITIES TASK FORCE

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INTERIM REPORT

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August 19, 2009

RECIPIENTS OF THIS REPORT INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- City of Aberdeen City Council Members
- Mayor Mike Levsen
- City Manager Lynn Lander
- Alexander Mitchell Library Board of Trustees
- Alexander Mitchell Library Foundation.

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## INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

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This interim report has been prepared by the Facilities Task Force appointed by the Alexander Mitchell Library Foundation on June 18, 2009 (the "Task Force").

Funded by the Alexander Mitchell Library Foundation, the Task Force has been charged with the duty to determine whether the existing library located at 519 S. Kline Street is adequate, or can be made adequate, to serve the library needs of the City of Aberdeen and Brown County for the foreseeable future. In the event the facility is determined not to be adequate, the Task Force is to gather additional information to offer guidance as to whether (1) the existing library can be modernized, enlarged, and otherwise modified to meet community needs, (2) another existing facility can be utilized to meet community needs, or (3) a new facility should be erected.

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## INFORMATION GATHERING ACTIVITIES

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The Task Force has undertaken the following efforts in an effort to gather information from interested parties including experts and community members:

- reviewed the 2008 needs assessment prepared by George Lawson Library Planning;
- conducted various information gathering sessions with area engineers and architects; and
- held two community listening sessions, both held on August 4, 2009.

In addition to these formal activities, members of the Task Force are also relying on their personal use of and familiarity with the existing library. Several of the Task Force members are members of either the Alexander Mitchell Library Foundation or the Alexander Mitchell Library Board of Trustees, or both. As a result of their positions on the foundation or the board, several Task Force members have toured the library at times of flooding and also have had numerous occasions to review the library usage patterns.

Members of the Task Force individually have toured other libraries, both in and out of the State of South Dakota, including newer facilities and facilities still under construction.

Members of the Task Force have toured potential alternate sites in Aberdeen, including the following:

- the former Roosevelt Junior High School located on South Kline Street;
- the two K.O. Lee properties located on First Avenue Southeast;
- the Blackstone property located on Fourth Avenue Southeast; and
- the Central Park location also on South Kline Street.

Finally, the Task Force members have also been made aware of comments, both written and oral, provided to library staff, as well as the comments of the public in informal settings after this process has gotten under way.

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## DISCUSSION OF ALTERNATIVES

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### CONDITION OF EXISTING FACILITY.

The existing library located at 519 South Kline Street is not adequate to provide continued services to our community. The building, originally constructed in 1963, has been plagued with water infiltration problems. During the listening sessions, the Task Force learned that flooding of the library occurred as early as 1978. Since completion of the commercial building next to the library and the widening of Highway 12, it appears that water infiltration through the basement walls and floor is a more serious problem than it had been previously. The library basement continues to be unusually humid during the spring, summer, and fall months, and heavy rains cause water to enter the basement. Although "mold" has not yet surfaced in unsafe levels, the library staff continues to diligently monitor this concern.

While more easily remedied, both the windows and roof would require significant repairs if the library was to continue to utilize this building. Recently, after a heavy rain, water flowing from the roof soaked ceiling tiles throughout the first floor and even ran behind the walls causing concern that wiring behind the walls would contact the water. The library closed early to safeguard staff and the public.

The current building cannot hold enough materials for a community as large as ours. The library staff is continually forced to dispose of materials not because of obsolescence, but due to lack of room. Lack of square footage has forced the staff to use shelving inaccessible by many, including the elderly and disabled. Occasionally, including this summer, patrons were denied participation in library programs as the library meeting rooms would not accommodate all who wished to participate. Use at the library meeting rooms is at approximately 90% of capacity, meaning that users are often denied use of this public facility as space is not available.

Parking at the current facility is often inadequate to accommodate the library's patrons.

### LOCATION.

There remain some library users who are particularly attached to the current building and its site. More importantly, however, seems to be the public's preference to maintain a central location for the library. At the listening sessions, the public discussed broadly that the library should remain centrally located within the City of Aberdeen, although some suggested that either of the K.O. Lee lots were sufficiently central to Aberdeen and were desirable as they are located on a bike path and a major city street.

### REHABILITATION OF EXISTING FACILITY.

In the opinion of the Task Force members, rehabilitation of the existing Alexander Mitchell Library facility does not appear to be the best alternative. Based upon the Task Force members' discussions with engineers, architects, and the consultants engaged by the city in 2008, rehabilitation of the existing structure for continued library services is impractical.

The library structure is of insufficient strength to permit a second floor to be built above the library without significantly augmented footings and other expensive structural changes. Some have suggested that the basement of the library be filled in and an addition be built to the north of the library. This alternative would result in a facility with inadequate parking and would necessitate significant rehabilitation of the existing structure.

It is the Task Force's conclusion that such an approach would result in minimal savings over construction of a new structure, either at the present or a different site.

### CONSTRUCTION OF NEW FACILITY AT THE NORTH END OF THE CURRENT BLOCK.

One of the suggestions made by the consultants in 2008 was construction of a new library on the north end of the current library block. This would most likely require the acquisition of the Johnson Building, a property that the Task Force understands is not presently offered for sale. Even if that property could be obtained (and presumably it could through the city's power of eminent domain), construction of a library on this site would necessarily require the building to be built on at least two floors. Even then, it is questionable whether the library could be supported with sufficient parking to meet library demand (at least without the addition of a parking ramp of some design). Indeed, under such a design, the new library would have less parking than the current (inadequate) parking presently available. Construction of the new office building to the east of the library has put substantial pressure on parking resources on that block. Construction of a new, better library could only be expected to add to the library patronage and parking demand.

It is the Task Force's conclusion that construction of a new facility at the north end of the city block on which the present facility is located is not a viable alternative.

### REHABILITATION OF EXISTING BUILDINGS.

The Task Force has discussed among its members, and the various experts with whom it has consulted, rehabilitation of various existing buildings located in the City of Aberdeen. Locations discussed include the following buildings:

- the Dakota Midland building;
- the former Elks building; and
- the Roosevelt Junior High School.

It is the opinion of the Task Force that Aberdeen's library should be a shining star in the community, and it should be an inviting aspect of our city. For that reason, reuse of an existing facility would be favored by the Task Force only if it could permit an improvement of library services to our community.

With that being the standard, it is the Task Force's conclusion that none of these existing structures offer desirable alternatives.

### Location.

Both the Dakota Midland and Elks buildings are located at the most northwestern portion of our community. As such, the Task Force believes the locations are not appropriate. It was pointed out during our community listening sessions that while most people have access to motor vehicles for transportation, many people, including many library users, do not have automobile access. It is for that reason that having the library centrally located is especially important.

### Structural Concerns.

The structural demands created by a library require a structure be built to hold 160 lbs. per square foot. Neither the Elks building nor Roosevelt Junior High School are built to meet these structural demands. Use of either building would require augmentation of footings and other major structural improvements. These structural improvements would result in rehabilitation costs for either building which would approximate or exceed the cost of new construction.

The Task Force is uncertain whether the Dakota Midland building is available for use as a library. In addition to its location, its design and layout would preclude its ability to provide improved library services to our community.

### CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW FACILITY.

The alternative the Task Force supports is the construction of a new library at one of four locations. Those locations are as follows:

- The site of the former Bethlehem Lutheran Church located on the block east of the federal building. This block is currently owned by Blackstone and is listed for sale (the "Blackstone Site").
- The second site favored by the Task Force is the site of the current Central Park located to the north of the former Roosevelt Junior High School. This block was donated to the city by the Lee family and apparently reverts to the Lee family in the event the property is ever used for something other than recreation. We believe that the construction of a library on this parcel would comport with the deed restrictions and would not result in any reversion (the "Central Park Site").

- The other two properties favored by the Task Force include the properties located to the east and to the west of the former K.O. Lee factory on First Avenue Southeast. The parcel located to the east of K.O. Lee comprises two full city blocks (the “East K.O. Lee Site”), and the parcel to the west is a full block (the “West K.O. Lee Site”).

Whether the library should be built on any one of these four alternative sites is subject to a variety of considerations.

#### Blackstone Site and Central Park Site.

The Blackstone Site and the Central Park Site are both located closer to the city center. Both of these parcels are adjacent to the Aberdeen Recreational and Cultural Center (the “ARCC”) and offer greater opportunities to coordinate programs between the city’s library and the city’s Parks and Recreation Department (“Parks and Rec”). Currently, the library and Parks and Rec coordinate on various programs, principally children’s programs. Locating the library at a site adjacent to Parks and Rec would facilitate coordination between the library and Parks and Rec.

#### K.O. Lee Sites.

Although the K.O. Lee Sites are not as close to city center, they are both located in proximity to the current Boys and Girls Club. Both parcels could be presumably procured at a more reasonable cost than the current asking price of the Blackstone Site. The East K.O. Lee Site is comprised of two blocks, and while two blocks would certainly not be required to construct a library sufficient to meet our present needs, acquisition of this parcel would allow for expansion, would allow adequate parking, as well as the opportunity for other uses including a park or other recreational use, all of which are ancillary to the operation of a library.

### SIZE, LAYOUT AND COST OF PROPOSED FACILITY.

#### Size.

The consultants engaged in 2008 by the Aberdeen City Council at the request of the Alexander Mitchell Library Board of Trustees suggested a facility having a size of approximately 50,000 square feet and they estimated the cost of such a facility to exceed \$12 million. The Task Force members believe that a 50,000 square foot facility is simply not justified by the size of our community presently. Examination of the consultant’s report shows that the proposed 50,000 square foot facility was based, in part, upon projections that our community is likely to enjoy a spike of more than 20% in population within the next 21 years. Some of us who have lived in this community for most of our lives have heard these optimistic projections of population growth for decades.

The current library facility, including basement, is comprised of 29,612 square feet. The Task Force members believe a library efficiently designed with 40,000 square feet could well meet the needs of our community. However, based upon the comments received in the listening sessions, as well as from discussions with experts including engineers and architects, it does appear prudent that the city design and build this library so as to easily permit expansion in the future if, in fact, a need for a larger facility is realized.

#### Layout.

While the Task Force members do not generally oppose the idea of constructing a library on more than one floor, use of a single floor seems preferable. A single floor facility provides greater ease of access to all members of our community, including the disabled and elderly. It would also allow the library management greater flexibility in staffing which may, over the life of the new facility, provide significant cost savings.

#### Cost.

The Task Force members believe such a facility can be built with new shelving, furniture and fixtures for approximately \$7 million. Even with such a significantly reduced budget, the Task Force members believe such a facility could be a shining star for our community, a facet that the community can use to encourage others to locate here, much as industry has used the new public high school and the new Northeast Health and Fitness Center operated by the YMCA to attract people to our community.

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## CLOSING COMMENTS

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The Task Force has been quite buoyed by the positive interest this project has received. Task Force members attended the listening sessions expecting substantial resistance to the prospect that the city would use city tax dollars to construct a new library. While there was some discussion as to why the existing building was not presently satisfactory, the vast majority of listening session attendees expressed their strong support for the construction of a new facility to serve Aberdeen's library needs for the next several generations. Indeed, a phrase Task Force members heard a number of times is that, the city should be encouraged to "dream big" and make this a shining example of what our community can offer. Those sentiments were echoed recently by an editorial in the Aberdeen American News on August 12, 2009. The Mayor and City Council members who attended the listening sessions likewise voiced support for the construction of a new library.


Councilman Jim Kraft annually polls residents of his northeastern Aberdeen district. He reported at one of the listening sessions that his most recent poll asked citizens specifically about their interest in a new library and the results of his poll were that Aberdonians favored this project.

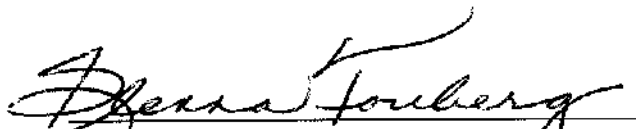
The August 18, 2009, Aberdeen American News reported the results of its poll evidencing that 57% of respondents supported the construction of a new library in the community.

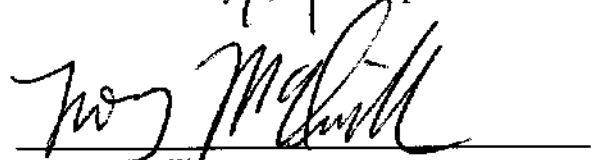
Having reached these conclusions set forth in this Interim Report, the Task Force leaves unanswered the question as to where the new facility should be located. At one of the listening sessions, City Councilman Dave Bunsness suggested that additional listening sessions should be scheduled to examine the future location of the library, if one is to be recommended. The Task Force has concluded that additional listening sessions would be appropriate to allow public discussion of this report and to discuss the most favorable location of the library. Additional listening sessions have been scheduled for September 8, 2009. After those sessions, the Task Force anticipates a supplement to this interim report.


Respectfully submitted,


  
Richard Thomas, Co-Chairperson

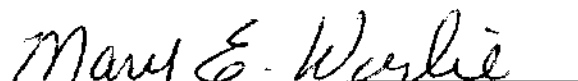
  
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