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Elk Rapids District Library

Case Statement for Proposed Expansion

For More Information

Elk Rapids District Library

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Case Statement for Proposed Expansion

Executive Summary

For more than 70 years – and through several renovations of the historic Island House – the Elk Rapids District Library has faithfully served the community in a multitude of ways: As a welcoming place that supports life-long learning, as a gathering place for all ages to participate in activities for personal and social enrichment, and as an icon that enhances the appeal and charm of Elk Rapids for residents and visitors alike, thereby contributing significantly to the Village’s economic vitality.

Community members love the location and charm of the Library, but they want more: comfortable seating, a larger children’s area, a place for teens, quiet reading and work spaces, more programs and activities, bigger spaces for programs and meetings, better lighting, more collaborative spaces, and a broader range of materials.

With the permission of the Elk Rapids Village Council, the Library Board in 2015 initiated a professional process to explore options that would meet the community’s desires for a better Library as expressed in surveys, interviews and strategic planning sessions. The Board has evaluated a number of possible solutions ranging from the use of other community spaces to constructing a new library at a different location to expanding the current facility.

With more than a year of study and analysis completed, the Library Board is returning to the Elk Rapids Village Council with a proposed expansion of the Island House that has been reviewed and is supported by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). See Addendum SHPO Letter of Support.

The conceptual plan, as prepared by the architectural firm of Hopkins Burns Design Studio, nationally recognized for its historic preservation work, positions the library to help meet many objectives of the Village’s Master Plan as well as satisfy many of the concerns raised by Village residents. The conceptual plan:

- Preserves the Island House’s historic designation.
- Retains the current two-story footprint of the Island House.
- Affects only two trees while enhancing views of the water and natural areas.
- Fulfills the principles of placemaking as called for in the Master Plan.
- Provides access to quality education and training.
- Serves community needs for indoor recreation.
- Contributes to downtown’s vibrancy and viability.
- Yields a large public good achieved through private contributions, not Village tax dollars.
- Retains the library as a long-term tenant of the Island House, financially responsible for much of the Island House’s maintenance and upkeep.

The Library Board firmly believes expansion of the existing facility is the best alternative as it would guarantee the long-term historic preservation of the Island House with no additional burden on the Village's budget, while simultaneously meeting the community's desires for a better library.

Great Communities and Great Libraries Go Hand-in-Hand

“To succeed today, libraries must master many different roles – some traditionally associated with libraries, some are [the result of evolving into a 21st century library]. Their new, multi-faceted missions must be supported with great design, flexible space, strong amenities, and popular programs. That’s a lot to juggle, but when everything works together, libraries become places that anchor community life and bring people together.”¹

The proposed expansion of the Island House Library enhances the essential delivery of educational, social and economic benefits to area residents and visitors and supports many principles, goals, and objectives in the Elk Rapids Collaborative Master Plan, among them, Placemaking, Education (Public Services), Recreation, Economic Development, and Natural Resources and Beautification:

Placemaking

As stated in the 2013 Elk Rapids Collaborative Master Plan (P 37):

The Master Plan is predicated on several guiding principles, which indicate the community’s distinct preferred essential direction. They are general and are meant to serve as a basis for the goals and objectives. The guiding principles are the result of community input and form the policy foundation of the Plan.

Placemaking is an interrelated process that results in high-quality, distinctive and attractive physical spaces reflecting the needs and ideals of those who use them.

Downtown Elk Rapids should continue to be an attractive and vibrant destination, with a healthy and prosperous mix of retail, office, housing, arts and cultural institutions and other land uses to serve the needs of permanent residents and visitors alike. Development in the downtown and in other areas of both the Village and Township will reflect the community’s unique character and history and will complement existing built patterns.

The Island House Library, with its proposed expansion, exemplifies the principles of placemaking in several ways:

1. A distinctive, attractive and comfortable gathering place and cultural institution with high-quality architecture, visual character and historic features.
2. Situated in a central location providing easy access and attracting people to central Elk Rapids.

1. “How to Make Your Library Great.” Project for Public Spaces, www.pps.org/reference/libraryattributes/.

3. Proposed flexible-use space to support an eclectic mix of uses and activities.
4. A place that fosters meaningful communication and interaction.

Education (Public Services)

Village Goal 7 “Access to quality education, training and community facilities for all residents will be provided and maintained.”

- *Objective 7. “Promote quality education and training opportunities for all residents.”*
- *Objective 8. “Support the public library.”*

Public surveys and interviews in the local community revealed a strong desire for expanded technology training including hardware and software applications. This demand is underscored by consistent findings in the 2015 Report from the Pew Research Center, “Libraries at the Crossroads,” which is based on a national survey of 2,004 Americans age 16 and older.² In addition to tech training, the proposed program room will be used for programs and activities supporting life-long learning on a wide range of topics.

Recreation

Village Goal 9. “Recreational facilities will be enhanced and the amenity level will be expanded to meet the needs of residents and visitors.”

- *Objective 4: “Encourage the consideration of recreational facilities as an integral part of community development plans.”*
- *Objective 5: “Include a community center, serving community needs for indoor recreation in the community development plans.”*

The library serves as a center of community life, supporting indoor recreation in the form of programs for personal enrichment and meeting space for local groups and clubs involved in various hobbies and activities, e.g. book club, investment club, knitting group and others. Reading for pleasure, building puzzles, playing computer games, accessing materials for personal enrichment and many more regular library activities are forms of indoor recreation enjoyed by patrons of all ages.

Economic Development

Village Goal 4. “Downtown Elk Rapids will feature high-quality architecture, a unique visual character and a distinctive vibrancy that contributes to the viability of the business district.”

- *Objective 5: “Continue and increase downtown shopping opportunities and festivities, such as outdoor shopping events, art displays and festivals.”*

Collaborative Goal 5. “Elk Rapids will be home to a diverse mix of businesses and manufacturing facilities, attractively developed and maintained and providing meaningful employment opportunities.”

- *Objective 2: Work with the Village Downtown Development Authority, Elk Rapids Chamber of Commerce and the local business community to provide needed services to Elk Rapids residents to foster local ownership and entrepreneurship.*

2. Horrigan, John. “Libraries at the Crossroads.” Pew Research , Pew Research Center, 15 Sept. 2015, www.pewinternet.org/files/2015/09/2015-09-15_libraries_FINAL.pdf.

The proposed program space with a broader range of programming will support job skill development and the learning needs of entrepreneurs and small business owners. Library collections and resources supporting these needs will also be enlarged.

The Island House Library contributes to the Village's long-term charm and appeal for residents and visitors alike, critical to the area's long-term economic vitality. Hosting art displays and activities related to downtown festivals would be possible with the proposed expansion, also contributing to the vibrancy of the downtown area.

Natural Resources & Beautification

Village Goal 2. "Environmentally sensitive areas, open space and public garden will be maintained for the enjoyment of residents, visitors and future generations."

- *Objective 3. "Protect our most prized features, such as the public library grounds, public parks, beaches, gardens, natural areas, tree lined streets, and open spaces."*
- *Objective 4. "Preserve and protect all healthy trees growing on public property and replace or add to the stock when needed."*
- *Objective 5. "Encourage creative design and planning techniques for all new development so as to produce visual harmony, preserve special features and protect vital natural resources."*
- *Objective 7. "Preserve and maintain existing active recreation areas."*

The proposed expansion would require the removal of one tree and moving a second, smaller memorial tree. Adding a replacement tree (native species) to the Island will be factored into the project. As noted in the project description below, the design will restore and preserve many of the historic features of the Island House. Much of the popular sledding area on the east side of the library will be unaffected by the proposed expansion; the hills on the north and west sides will be untouched and are used for sledding as well.

Project Description

The proposed library addition is two levels aligning with the current building: main floor and a lower walkout level. Combined, the two levels are roughly 6300 sq. ft. The plans show the addition extending from the southwest corner of the library and connecting to the existing west wing of the building. The main floor features a program room, adult reading area and restrooms. The lower level contains the children and teen areas, casual seating and vending area, restrooms and tutoring rooms. The Book Cellar will remain in the lower level and the main entrance will stay in its current location as well. The generous use of windows throughout the design allows for views of the Island House property, trees and glimpses of the bay.

The plan also calls for the restoration of several historical elements of the Island House including the parlor, the fireplace located near the front desk, and a conservatory located to the west of the porch along the face of the building.

The additional space allows for reconfiguration and modest expansion of the adult collections and the addition of comfortable seating, work stations and quiet reading areas. The children and teen areas will have similar amenities and capacity for larger collections as well. Separate computer stations are planned for the adult, children and teen areas.

The plans can be viewed in the library or on the library website: elkrapidslibrary.org.

Financial Summary

If the proposed expansion is approved, the Library Board will continue with its financial analysis and planning including detailed estimates of construction, the overall project, and operations and maintenance. The Board also expects to conduct a fundraising feasibility study. The resulting financial report will factor into the Board's decision-making for the project.

The Library's annual operating budget for 2017/18 is \$313,454. This amount is expected to increase with a new addition, however there are efficiencies that will help offset some of the gains, i.e., the operating budget will not double. The natural process of appreciation in property and assessment values will help provide financial stability over an extended period as well.

The majority of the Library's operating costs are funded by the Library District millage, which includes taxes paid by residents in the Village and Township of Elk Rapids and Milton Township. The amount contributed by Milton Township residents exceeds the total collected from the Village and Township of Elk Rapids by nearly 40%.

Alternate Solutions Explored for Additional Space

The need for additional space for the Library has been discussed for several years and many alternatives have been studied and also implemented.

Rebuild the Carriage House

Rebuilding the carriage house that was on the Island and was torn down by the Village some years ago was one of the first ideas explored. Having Library services and functions in two separate buildings presents many challenges, including:

- 1) A separate facility not directly connected to the existing building will require a staffing commitment at all times the facility is open for library specific uses.
1. Placing any part of the library's collections or services in the carriage house will require library users to go to two different locations for library service. This arrangement is inefficient for the library and inconvenient for library users, particularly during winter.
2. Building a separate facility not connected to the library does not help solve the existing crowded conditions for housing library materials, a cramped children's area, poorly located and noisy restrooms, lack of useful meeting rooms, a storytelling area for children, study rooms, a separate teen area, etc.
3. A separate facility does not solve the critical need for more space for daily library operations.

This is true for any idea that involves two separate buildings whether they are both on the Island or one is somewhere else in town, e.g. the Lighthouse.

Hold Programs in Other Community Spaces/ Buildings

It is likely that even with an expanded program space, the Library will continue to use other community spaces when special facilities are needed, such as a kitchen for a cooking demo,

or the audience size exceeds the program space at the library, such as the summer children's reading program.

In addition to the limitations cited above of operating in two buildings, there are several other important considerations:

1. There are many scheduling conflicts when working with alternative sites and planning must be done far in advance. Drop-in or impromptu programs generally cannot be accommodated at off-site locations. As a public facility, the library is able to welcome and support any number of community groups and clubs that would like a meeting place for regular meetings and programs.
2. Most alternative locations have fees and/or restrictions.
3. Library resource materials cannot be used offsite due to the difficulty of transporting them. This is particularly true of computers, but also quantities of books and AV equipment.
4. Bringing people to the library for programs also introduces them to library resources and encourages regular library usage. It also makes it convenient to access additional materials.

Move to a Different Building

The Library Board has considered the option of moving out of The Island House and renovating and moving into another existing building. No suitable buildings have been found for sale or lease in the District. The Board toured the property at 705 Ottawa St., which is zoned residential. In addition to the zoning considerations, the home is in serious disrepair and is not suitable for a library. Construction of a new building on the site would be required and per the recommendation below, this site is not large enough for new library construction.

Build New

One of the library architects was asked about the size and cost of new construction. It was indicated that approximately five acres would be required to provide for a 10,000 sq. foot building with all services on one level, ample parking, and room for future expansion. Assuming we could find such a parcel that was affordable and centrally located, construction costs alone would most likely be in excess of \$5 million. This figure is not feasible for a fundraising campaign and it seems unlikely a bond issue or increased millage to pay for a new library would pass.

Better Space Utilization in Current Library

A library specialist was asked to comment on current space utilization and make recommendations for improvement. The feedback indicated there were no obvious areas where small changes could make an appreciable improvement. "The library has done a fine job maximizing the materials offered to the public in terms of collections and seating, virtually utilizing every nook and cranny. I do not think there are gross inefficiencies at play here. It would be possible to explore the addition of more collection shelving to the front porch, but that detracts from the quality of that beloved and special space."

After considering all of these alternatives, the Library Board has concluded the best option is to expand the current building in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior Guidelines.

The Island House would retain its historic marker and area residents would continue to enjoy the Island House Library as it has for almost 70 years.

Summary

The Elk Rapids Library plays a vital role in such community services as early childhood literacy, technology training and workforce development. In addition, it serves as a center of community life, welcoming everyone and providing a range of services, collections and programs for personal and social enrichment.

The proposed expansion project will preserve the Island House historic designation, restore historic features and will affect only two of the trees on the island property. The conceptual designs and features embrace the principles of placemaking, contributing to the character and vibrancy of the Village.

The Library has been an excellent steward of the Island House for nearly 70 years; losing the Library as a long-term tenant would shift a large financial responsibility for maintenance and upkeep of the Island House back to the Village. The cost of the proposed expansion will come from private funding.

Perhaps most important, the proposed expansion supports many key objectives of the Village Master Plan, able to help Elk Rapids and the region meet the demands of the 21st Century. With this expansion, the Library will be well positioned to serve the region's residents in ways that will benefit all of us, strengthening us as individuals and as a community. Better library, better community.