

Many of you know that the Elk Rapids District Library received a generous bequest from the estate of Charles Heffer a couple of years ago. Some people have asked what we are doing with the money. For now it is safely invested, earning a very small amount of interest, while we determine the best use for this once in a lifetime gift.

In the summer of 2014 we hired consultants to conduct a survey, interviews, and two planning sessions with community leaders to develop a strategic plan for the Library. What we learned was that most people love the Library, whether or not they use it. This building has a special place in the hearts and minds of many residents. It truly is a treasure in the community.

People who do use the Library told us they love what we do, but they want more. More comfortable seating, a bigger children's area, a place for teens, more programs, better lighting, more gathering places, bigger meeting rooms, and more materials of all kinds. A surprising number of people want a coffee bar. With only 3,000 square feet we are very limited in what we can offer. Every available nook and cranny has been put to good use, and we are out of room.

Looking at the community values identified during the planning process, and the feelings about the Library building, the Library Board set a goal to make the Library a Community Center. Fortunately the building has been well maintained and is structurally sound. We want to build on the charm, delightful location, and all of the other positive aspects of the Library to assure it will be a vital, busy, centerpiece of Elk Rapids for years to come.

Based on our findings and the resulting strategic plan, we approached the Village Council to ask for permission to explore the possibility of improving and expanding the Library. They said yes. Over the winter we interviewed several architects and have chosen who we believe to be the most qualified team to help us create a concept of what an expanded Library might look like. The team consists of Tamara Burns and Gene Hopkins from Hopkins Burns Design Studio, and Seth Penchansky and Daniel Whisler from Daniels and Zermack Architects. Gene Hopkins and Tamara Burns have extensive historic preservation and restoration experience, doing a lot of work on Mackinac Island, including the expansion and other design work for the Grand Hotel. Seth Penchansky and Dan Whisler have many years of experience designing, building, and remodeling libraries.

These architects will be making three visits to Elk Rapids this summer to gather information and input from the community. The first visit will be on Wednesday, June 1. There will be a few times during the day when community members can drop in and talk with one of the architects. Those drop in times will be posted at the Library as soon as they are determined. There will also be a public meeting at 7:00 p.m. on June 1 at the Harbor Pavilion. This is an opportunity to meet the architects and give them feedback about our community, vision, and values.

They will be back twice in July with the primary focus being community engagement through meetings and one on one conversations. We will post those dates and times as they get closer.

Our goal is to give every resident the chance to participate in this first phase of the Library Improvement Project. We hope you will want to be part of this exciting time for the Library and the community.

Nannette Miller  
Director, Elk Rapids District Library