

Middletown Springs Neighborhood Forum

Building Committee News!

DAVID MUNYAK
EAST ST

The Middletown Springs Library, Town Office funding, and Your property taxes.

As some of you may have heard, the Building Committee has been discussing the possibility of combining the Town Office and Library under one roof. While this is true, apparently the rumor mill is in high gear. "The only reason the Building Committee wants the Library to move is so they can get money" is one snippet that has been circulating.

Here's the real story.

The Library has been doing a great job over the last few years; expanding their collection, adding new technology, running fundraisers and community events, and drawing in an ever increasing number of patrons. The Library Board recognized that they were outgrowing their space several years ago and began discussing ways to create more room, primarily by building an addition onto their current building.

At the same time, the Building Committee was looking at places to locate a new Town Office and ways that such a building might be funded. The most obvious way to pay for it is simply to have town taxpayers pick up the bill. However, this is the least creative and laziest approach. It's also an approach that is likely to meet with disapproval from those same taxpayers. The Building Committee wants town residents to be enthusiastic about having a new Town Office and one way to meet that goal is to have it require as few town tax dollars as possible.

To that end, the Building Committee spoke with the Poultney Town Manager, Jonas Rosenthal, who was extremely successful in getting the Stone Bridge Inn completely renovated using virtually NO town taxpayer dollars. This approach seemed appealing and the Building Committee decided that it should pursue a similar tactic. The key to this method is to make the building serve more than one purpose. There is surprisingly little grant money or other funding available to build a Town Office building. There are many grants and other sources of money available for community oriented uses, a library being one of them. In fact, library projects can bring in enormous amounts of funding.

Since the Library was discussing expansion, and the town needs a new Town Office, combining the two uses in one building seemed like an opportunity to kill several birds with one stone. The Library would get more space, more parking, and a new, efficient building, most likely paid for with grant money. Since a foundation, walls and roof would already be paid for with Library funding, the town would pay for adding four more walls and a floor for its portion and have a new Town Office for a fraction of the cost of building an entire building. It seems like a prudent and fiscally responsible plan and one that would give the town an enormous return for a small investment. The Library Board was interested and discussed it with the Building Committee and among themselves.

Every solution creates its own set of problems however. The Library Board and some of it's patrons are reluctant to leave their cozy church building and it's welcoming ambiance and they worry about what would become of it if they moved. There are other logistical and administrative issues associated with being in a larger space and a project of this scope would require a huge commitment of time and effort from the Library Board.

The Building Committee never tried to "sell" the Library Board on the idea of moving, preferring that they do their own research and come to an independent conclusion, which they did. I am nevertheless sad to report that the Library Board has made the decision to remain in their current building with its existing footprint. We wish them well there and thank them for taking the time to consider this alternative.

The Building Committee is committed to creating an attractive, useful and appropriate building that will serve the town for generations and to do so using as little town tax money as possible. We will explore other opportunities for incorporating multiple uses within the building that might bring funding along with them, as well as seeking donations of time, money or materials that will help to reduce costs.

We welcome your ideas or input.

The Building Committee meets on the first Wednesday and third Thursday of each month. Meetings are open to the public.