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Dear Friends of the Downtown Library ~

The downtown library continues to be battered right and left. It is apparent that just about anything we attempt to question is mowed over by decisions already made by pro-mixed use project supporters before the City Council officially discusses any matter concerning the downtown library. We seem stuck in a position of defense to their offense.

Read on to be informed. Yes, there's lots, and eyes may glaze over. So please give yourselves some quiet time, like reading a good book. An informed citizenry is not like instant coffee. Time brewing fresh ground coffee beans is worth the effort!

The Newest Wrinkle

During Tuesday's City Council meeting we learned that ***\$1.5 million of the funds allocated to the downtown branch will be used instead on the Branciforte and Garfield branches***, the cost models for which came in \$2 million higher than was budgeted for them. Another \$500,000 is to come from fundraising by the Friends of the Santa Cruz Public Libraries (FSCPL). This was the recommendation of Library Director Susan Nemitz and the City Council approved it.

Question #1 Why does this matter?

The budget for the downtown library is no longer \$27 million. It is now reduced to \$25.5 million. Even before the Council approval, Director Nemitz had remarked that "*the downtown library is underfunded.*" During public comment, before the vote, Rena Dubin (former DLAC member, now with FSCPL) mentioned "*taking the downtown library off the table.*" Two days later, I asked her what that meant. She prevaricated.

The diminishment of the remaining funds for the downtown library could mean just about anything, including part of a greater strategy to get the library built in a mixed-use project. That is, with less in the budget for the downtown library, even if a 32,000 sf garage library comes in the same cost as the Jayson proposal, the FSCPL will say that they simply cannot guarantee do proper fundraising for a bare bones renovated library compared to a brand new shiny, modern "showpiece" library in the garage. Even with such a fundraising threat from SCPL, "they" will have to work very hard now (and I am sure "they" have already discussed this behind closed doors) to make the garage "showpiece" library come out equal in cost to the Jayson proposal cost model (or even cheaper).

Question #2

At Tuesday's Council meeting Cynthia Mathews said that following the 2014 - 2023 Library Facilities Master Plan (published 3/28/13) it was known that more money would be needed than what was requested in the ballot measure. Interestingly, in the Master Plan, both Garfield and Branciforte were given an initial repair and some upgrades budget amount for what eventually morphed into greatly rebuilt branches (including a children's outdoor area and other landscaping).

If Cynthia Mathews knew that more money would be needed for those two branches, almost two years before the 2016 Measure S vote, then why didn't she - and others - start fundraising or speak about the need for fundraising then? Why wait over 5 years after the 2016 vote to make that statement in

public?

Budget Problems Across the Library System

Every branch is underfunded. Not just downtown. Why?

All of the current problems began when the Library Administration unwisely decided to set the annual property tax amount for the ballot measure at \$49.50, knowing that it would not generate enough money to do what "they" had envisioned as upgrades, modernization, renovation and new building. A year ago, Janis O'Driscoll (acting Director at the time of the 2016 vote) also said they knew it would be insufficient but they decided that if they asked for more per parcel that the measure would fail to get enough yes votes. We'll never know though, will we?

So they started off in 2016 with an unwise decision and everything, financially, has gone downhill from there. The only good news was that they underestimated the multi-family parcels inventory of the County, thus taking in more annually than they thought they would, plus the administration costs of the Measure S monies turned out to be a wee bit less. That is why the original allocation to the City of Santa Cruz jumped from \$27 million total for three branches (with \$23 million for downtown) to \$31.25 million (with \$27 million for downtown). Still, \$31.25 is not enough to make the grandiose show pieces desired now by just about everybody, enticed by the eye candy of visuals of modern libraries all over the nation, all over the world.

Lack of Measure S Oversight

Measure S did not create a Citizen's Oversight Committee or Board, as is a **common practice** with ballot measures that involve taxpayer's money. Instead, it was assumed that the [Library Facilities Financing Authority](#) (LFFA) would handle that responsibility. However, the LFFA, composed of the city managers of three jurisdictions and the CAO of the County, is far removed from the public. In fact, while it will listen to public comment, it does not interact with the public at its meetings. Its irregularly scheduled meetings (from 8 to 12 each year) are at 9 am.

The LFFA and the [Library Joint Powers Authority](#) (composed of the same four Board members) both rely on the [Library Advisory Commission](#) (LAC), which was formed specifically to be "*a voice of the community*," but which has never functioned well in that regard either. The LAC irregularly scheduled

never functioned well in that regard either. The LAC irregularly scheduled meetings are at 6:30 pm (6 meetings in 2019, 4 meetings in 2018, 9 meetings in 2017). However, the LAC does not follow the finances of Measure S or make recommendations about those monies. Their meetings are not well advertised and usually have only one or two members of the Santa Cruz County community at large of which the LAC is supposedly a voice.

So, we have an LFFA, a JPA and an LAC ... and none are acting as oversight easily available to the public to make sure taxpayers funds are being spent as they were presented in the ballot measure.

Other Problems

Once more Measure S is not what voters in general thought it was; that is, a financing of repairs and upgrades for the library system. Modernizing somehow became the key word of Measure S. Modernizing means tossing out all of the old (except for the newest branch, the already-redeveloped Live Oak branch) and providing new everything.

All branches are way over budget totaling millions of dollars throughout the system and that is not due only to the escalation of construction costs, as some would have us swallow. It is due to asking too much and not being content with sufficiency. This constant voracious societal demand for more and bigger is what drives destruction of the environment, locally, nationally and globally. Apparently decision-makers can't connect the dots. Do we continue to live beyond our means? Can we accept that bigger is not better, it's just bigger?

The similarities are basic for all branches, even the two that were clearly identified for new construction during the Measure S campaign (Felton and Capitola). Rather than having the branches repaired, upgraded and modernized, we've witnessed manipulation of a public fervor for architectural grandeur. Plans call for substituting sleek for cozy, snazzy for practical, entertaining for informing, loud and noisy for quiet contemplation, and social services for informational services. More empty space than peopled space, for a sense of expansiveness, which is energy foolishness in cities and counties with Climate Action Plans and Climate Emergency Resolutions (e.g., replacement of eleven foot high ceilings with eighteen foot high energy-inefficient ceilings, while even the new shelving will only be five feet high).

As to whether the rebuilt downtown library would be a "stunning architectural attraction" or "run-of-the-mill" architecture, that depends on expectations. When many first saw Jayson's visuals (10/24 meeting presentation) the response was that it was stunning.

Part of the problem is that people grade architecture by comparing one building to other buildings (libraries included) rather than thinking about a building in the context of the place. Santa Cruz is a place of white (adobe historical buildings, even some of the residential homes built in the 1880s and 1920s). We are not a place of glass and steel. Yet.

A Bit of Good News

At Tuesday's Council meeting, Mayor Cummings asked about the reduction of the book collection at the 2 branches. Jayson explained that was pretty much the trend - fewer books, more space for computers, meeting rooms, etc. Jayson added that ADA rules made it so that if a patron wanted a book on a high shelf, staff had to be there, implying that shorter book shelves (with fewer books) would reduce staff time. Jayson also explained that shelves higher than 60" required bracing to the floor (seismic safety) which reduced the flexibility of the space. At least now that Subcommittee members (Brown, Cummings and Meyers) have heard that it is not just the smaller square footage of the downtown branch that will result in a smaller collection, so the moaning and groaning that the renovation will result in a smaller collection can be seen in a different light. Those opposed to a smaller downtown library can stop using reduction of books as a reason to defame the 32,000 sf Jayson downtown library proposal.

Where is a Real Renovation Proposal?

Although Jayson Architecture produced an intriguing proposal for the downtown branch, constrained by a \$27 million budget, we still have not seen a real renovation plan. As beautiful as the visuals make it look, Jayson's proposal is not a renovation plan. It is a rebuilding plan, starting with the skeleton of the existing building and replacing everything!

Every time we walk by the library, we see a really attractive building, exterior wise. It's innards need work.

Yet, we still do not have a proposal that brings the current building up to code (e.g., all ADA bathrooms) with two new elevators, replacement of the old air handling system with new HVAC, installed on a new roof, electrical and plumbing upgrades as necessary, removal of remaining asbestos, fully fire sprinkled, seismic retrofits on the lower perimeter, freshly painted walls. How do we know we can't do that for \$25.5 million? But we repeat ourselves.

Going Forward

We'll continue to **focus on the positives** for keeping the library at Center and Church streets, with the beautiful possibility of the entrance reconfigured to face City Hall. We'll continue to focus on decoupling the library from the garage, quoting the City Manager who said over two years ago that *the garage is not dependent on the library as a tenant*. We'll collaborate with Downtown Commons Advocates (DCA) on their goal for a public plaza on Lot 4 and with the Campaign for Sustainable Transportation (CFST) on their plans for a ballot initiative (to allow city residents to vote on any multi-story parking garage) on the November. Individually, city residents will work toward retaining Chris Krohn and Drew Glover on the City Council post March 3 election. We'll continue to engage with the Council Library Subcommittee.

Upcoming

January 24 at 4pm - Deadline for submitting proposals for Mixed Use library

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Week of January 27 - 31 = Screening and evaluation of proposals with selection of architectural firm.

All the best,

Jean Brocklebank

[Don't Bury The Library](#)

