

Update #49 1/4/19

Dear friends of the Downtown Library ~

This Update is devoted solely to Stephen Kessler and his latest exquisite column in today's Sentinel. What a pleasant surprise to read it earlier!

Stephen captured all aspects of the matter before us and articulated them clearly. It would be well for everyone involved -- from the City Council and City Manager, to staff of the Economic Development Department, and the Library System administration -- to read and digest this column.

Be green now. Save Lot 4. Rebuild the library.
by Stephen Kessler

January 4, 2020
Santa Cruz Sentinel

<https://www.santacruzsentinel.com/2020/01/04/stephen-kessler-be-green-now-save-lot-4-rebuild-the-library/>

"Last month I attended the Santa Cruz Downtown Library Renovation Cost Assessment Community Meeting, an opportunity for Abe Jayson and Katie Stuart of Jayson Architects to introduce the public to their ideas for redesigning and rebuilding the Church Street library on its current site within the budgetary constraints (\$27 million) given to them by the city. Jayson was not advocating for this option but presenting a picture of what is possible and evaluating its feasibility. Their presentation was the first specific example we've been given—unlike the purely conceptual and imaginary notion of a mixed-use parking-library-housing (-office-retail?) thing—of what a reconceived library might look like, and what it would cost at current rates (expected to escalate 8 to 10 percent per year).

"The city's premature attempt to impose on Santa Cruz their ill-conceived garage-library elicited a backlash in the community that has moved the City Council to appoint a subcommittee (Justin Cummings, Sandy Brown and Donna Meyers) to evaluate possible options. Jayson's objective take on renovation was a reality check for partisans of all persuasions. By reducing the footprint of the existing building to its seismically sound core 30,000 square feet with a higher proportion of publicly accessible space, replacing the one-story outer sections with landscaping and usable outdoor patios, and turning the entrance toward Center Street facing City Hall, the newly redesigned and reconstructed library would remain, appropriately, an integral part of Civic Center. When the Civic Auditorium is renovated, as planned, the combination will revitalize the civic (as distinct from commercial) heart of Santa Cruz.

"Rebuilding the library where it stands would also spare the magnolia trees and open space of Lot 4, targeted as the site for the garage-based project a few blocks away. The reduced square footage would make for a less-expansive space than some would like to see, but no one has shown us how the mixed-use model would produce a better

library. And while some of the adult book collection would have to be distributed among the branch libraries to make more room for children's books, the system would continue to function as it does now, with books freely circulated from one branch to another. Renovation of the two-story core of the library would also be a far "greener" use of the existing building than tearing it down or constructing a concrete behemoth on Cedar Street. And it costs less to heat and cool and maintain a smaller building.

"The rub is that in order to do more than a bare-bones renovation for \$27 million it will cost an additional \$7 million (at current rates) to add the esthetic touches and handsome landscaping that would make it a stunning architectural attraction. Additional funds would likewise be needed to build the library-garage, and nobody knows or is willing to guess how many more millions of over-the-top dollars that would require. Ace fundraiser Vivian Rogers of Friends of the Library claims that it's easier to raise money for a new and bigger project than for the scaled-down remodel of the old library—but that is a self-defeating prophecy reflecting her own institutional preference for the mixed-use megalith. Someone who believes in the value of conservation and renovation, a well-informed, articulate enthusiast, could surely convince prospective donors of both bang-for-the-buck and environmental benefits of leaving the library in Civic Center, where it belongs.

"The next stage of this saga is a call for proposals, with specific designs rather than vague ideas, of what the mixed-use block-long five-story structure would actually look like, and what it would cost. Then the City Council and the community can compare the choices and people can decide for themselves what is most healthy for downtown, long term.

"If I had \$7 million to spare, I would rather invest it in an environmentally sensitive, appropriately scaled and located rebirth of a building whose bones are good than in a space-consuming, auto-centric Taj Garage that would obliterate one of downtown's most attractive open spaces."

With gratitude to Stephen Kessler,
Don't Bury The Library