

Grant a new chapter for Sherborn Library project

By Sarah Freedman, dover-sherborn@wickedlocal.com Posted Aug. 6, 2015 at 12:01 AM

The Sherborn Library is starting a new chapter in its history with the recent awarding of a \$3.6 million grant from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, an essential funding source that will make renovations and an expansion to the building a reality.



One of the signs in the Sherborn Library that has patrons "imagine" the library after the renovations are completed.

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The wait is over, and after being on a list for a construction grant since May 2012, the funds are available.

Both Mary Moore, the chairwoman of the Library Board of Trustees, and Elizabeth Johnston, the director of the Sherborn Library, have been involved the grant process for years.

Moore, who is one of nine elected library trustees, has been on the board for four years; prior to serving in this role, she was a member of the library design building committee and the Friends of the Sherborn Library.

Johnston, who has been the director of the Sherborn Library for 27 years, said her role in the project is to be a primary liaison between the current library building committee, which is a committee of volunteers who will collaborate in the construction process, trustees, town officials and MBLC to "ensure that the project is fulfilling the

building program that we wrote to garner the grant."

Prior to the recent \$3.6 million construction grant, Johnston was involved with getting a planning and design grant in 2007 from the MBLC, which allowed the library to hire a project manager and architectural firm to develop preliminary designs that were presented to Sherborn town boards and committees.

And, as the planning and design process was successful, this enabled the advancement to the next step: a construction grant that covers 50 percent of the project's total cost.

She called the process a "rigorous" one that involved writing and analysis of the community the building would benefit and demographic trends.

Johnston explained the community applying for the grant must also be willing to meet the local share of 50 percent of the project's cost and a long-range plan on file with the MBLC that shows its goals and actions for expansion and construction.

She added, "The final document with appendices of technical studies is about 300 pages. I began the research and writing in 2011 and filed it with the state in January 2012."

The trustees, Moore said, have been working diligently for four years to secure this grant to fund the expansion project, which she described as a public/private partnership with the goal of funding it from municipal, state grants and private fundraising.

She said, “When we were placed on the waiting list for the MBLC grant in 2012, we launched a \$3.5 million capital campaign. Our fundraising success, along with the MBLC grant of \$3.6 million goal allowed us to bring the overall project to the town for a municipal contribution of \$1 million.”

Made possible by the grant, Moore said the expansion will meet the evolving needs of the library with features such as a new children’s room, teen media lab and community space, in addition to incorporating new technology and being compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

She believes these additions will allow the library to be “relevant and useful for the entire community for the next 40 years.”

Johnston said the usage of the library has changed over her tenure, but the institution remains an important one.

She said, “Sherborn’s existing library is an essential town service, a well-loved and much-admired building. The residents of Sherborn want their library and realize it is time to update the 1970 facility to meet code and improve access.”

Johnston provided some details about the new and improved areas that are designed to benefit all ages.

She noted that the children’s room will provide a “distinct space for young learners” to acquire hands-on skills, and the young adult space will allow for individual study and supply collaborative space. Meeting spaces for presentations are also in the plans.

With the inclusion of an exterior, viewable educational garden, Johnston added, “These concepts express the original design of this building that unites indoor and outdoor experiences in a new layout that supports technology, collections, community gatherings and active use that were not present in 1970. But, our overarching vision is to preserve the intergenerational quality of the space.”

There is a “virtual library” where users can access the Minuteman Network and the library’s databases and digital magazines, she said, but space for studying is still in demand.

Johnston added, “The appetite for traditional service has not subsided, a sharing economy of print and media collections attracts young adults as well as adults and families who carry on a valued tradition and are also very smart about early childhood education. The appetite for technology has grown and refined usage in e-book and e-reader access.”

Sherborn Selectman DeRensis has been a staunch support of the library and its efforts to renovate and expand every step of the way.

He said, “I with my colleagues placed a ballot question on the ballot in May, when the voters of the town voted overwhelmingly in favor of the one million dollar appropriation.”

The reason he has supported each step to expand the building is a simple one.

DeRensis added, “I see the library as an important investment for all the people of the town, a focal point for the community to develop its sense of community, where our residents congregate, where Sherbornite encounters Sherbornite, where knowledge and tools for knowledge and education are available to all our

citizens, where young and old and all generations, come together. I see the Library as a community center, an essential part of the cultural, social and educational fabric of the town.”

He noted his delight that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has made the \$3.6 million available for the project and is “awestruck by the outpouring of private financial support in the amount of over \$3.5 million in private donations.”

He said, “Thank you to the library trustees and the many people who have worked so long and so hard to bring this project to this successful point — where the construction may now begin.”

The timeline for the project, Johnston said, is to have the library building committee and the trustees hire the project manager and architects to complete and get approved full construction schematics by the end of 2015. When that is accomplished, they could be able to hire the general contractor in early 2016, with the intention of breaking ground at the beginning of the 2016 construction season.

She said, “Our professionals estimate that if the proposed condition and timing are met, we will open the expanded and renovated library in 2017.”

Johnston said the Friends of the Sherborn Library have helped the trustees steward the effort for library improvement to make it a team effort.

Moore concurred and credited many others for its success such as Steve Borgeson, the chairman of the capital campaign for the project. His efforts and leadership really helped the project gain support at town meeting and at the town election, she noted.

She said, “Former Library Trustee Chair Stacey Brandon and Library Director Elizabeth Johnston have been driving this project from the beginning. Their leadership was exemplary during this entire process.”

Moore thanked the town for their support.

She said, “The unanimous vote at Town Meeting was a wonderful testament to how much the Sherborn Library means to so many in town. For a small town, the library truly is the living room of our community.”

Johnston agreed and added, “All involved in the Library Project are very thankful for the support of town meeting, but, even more so, the unanimous vote was a thank-you that every member of the community expressed to each other or on behalf of one another.”

Moore and the library trustees are very grateful for the donations of time, money and talents that has gotten them to the construction stage.

She added, “Just as the existing library has served us well for over 40 years, the newly renovated and expanded library will continue to meet the needs of Sherborn’s residents and be a source of pride for years to come.”