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Norwalk Purchasing Land for New Library

The City of Norwalk is entering into a purchasing agreement with Diligent Development on behalf of the Norwalk Easter Public Library in preparation for a much needed, larger library building. The location of the future library will be within the new Norwalk Central development near the corner of East 18th Street and Chatham Avenue.

“The property will not be developed right away – construction is at least five years away,” stated Library Director Jean Strable. FEH Design is working on architectural renderings to show what the library will look like. The new library will be 40,000 square feet to allow for the size of the community we serve now and our projected population growth over the next 20 years.

Strable also noted, “Last year, over 72,000 people visited the library. The current library is already feeling the squeeze as we often have overflow attendees at our programs and events. We offered 631 programs and events with nearly 20,000 people attending last year. We have had to give up one of our two study rooms to create office space. It is difficult to build a robust collection when we are confined to the shelf space we have.”

Norwalk needs more gathering spaces, and the new library will include meeting rooms, a conference room, quiet study rooms, spaces to display artwork, computing/technology areas, and makerspace rooms. The library receives approximately 50 requests each month for meeting and study room space that cannot be filled due to lack of available space.

The projected overall cost of the project will likely exceed \$20 million. The library will be conducting a capital campaign feasibility study to help with fundraising efforts in the future as well as advocacy to approach Norwalk voters for a referendum to construct the library. The Norwalk Easter Public Library Foundation will assist with the capital campaign fundraising. It is expected that grants will also help fund the new library building.

Library and community leaders have worked with Denny Sharp with FEH Design to complete a Library Space Needs Assessment. The group determined the current 11,500 square foot library facility is too small to effectively serve the quickly growing community. A Site Selection Committee identified 17 potential locations within Norwalk and used 18 ranking criteria, including: location convenient to the community; potential for future expansion; space for outdoor amenities; accessibility; ample parking; property availability; infrastructure; and taxable value. After reviewing the potential locations, the site in Norwalk Central was chosen for fulfilling the most criteria.

The Library Board of Trustees authorized the use of a very generous donation from the estate of former Norwalk area resident Patricia Boss Lawrence to purchase the property. “We are extremely grateful for this gift as it allows us to purchase land to kickstart the fundraising and advocacy processes so we can build a library to better serve our quickly expanding community,” said Strable.

“We’re grateful for the partnership with the City of Norwalk on building out Norwalk Central. Diligent Development and the City’s continued investment in the area illustrates the commitment to making this a destination and central hub for visitors and residents alike to enjoy with walkable amenities. The library adds yet another element to live, work, play, and LEARN to the growing area,” stated Tim Portzen, Vice President, Diligent Development.

Anyone interested in contributing to the library project can contact Jean Strable at jstrable@norwalk.iowa.gov or 515-981-0217.

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