Pike Library Explains Design Theory

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MILFORD — The Pike County Public Library made its case for choosing a somewhat controversial design for a new main branch in Milford’s historic business district Tuesday night and managed to win some converts to a design supporters say adds to the complicated and interesting architectural history of the town.

More than 100 people attended the public information session at the Pike County Courthouse main courtroom Tuesday to hear Building Task Force Chair Maleyne Syracuse and Architect Frederic Schwartz talk about why the county and the area need a new library and just how Schwartz arrived at his competition designs.

Syracuse said the need to build a new Main Branch becomes abundantly clear when looking at the growth figures. Pike County may be growing fastest in Pennsylvania, but the demand for library services is outpacing that by a significant margin. She noted the county has seen a 27 percent increase in population between 2000 and 2006, but the number of registered patrons jumped 73 percent. Library visits increased 48 percent and total circulation is up 50 percent in that same period of time.

The Pike County Library has also fallen behind the progress of its peers, ranking last among the 21 counties with populations between 40,700 and 76,700 and nine in population. The county ranks 20th in the number of periodicals and public access computers. Where libraries across the country average nearly three pieces of print materials per person, Pike County has just over one per person among counties with similar populations.

A significant part of the problem, according to Syracuse, is the diminutive size of its main branch facilities, now located in the Community House at the corner of Broad and East Harford Street. The Pike Library moved into the 2,500-square-foot building, which was originally built as a home, in 1991 when the county contained about 9,000 people, she said.

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Discuss New Milford Library

Architect Frederic Schwartz, right, talks with Milford resident Wendy Reading, left, whose home is located next to the Pike County Public Library’s proposed main branch on East Harford Street. Schwartz said he will personally be meeting with adjoining property owners to discuss their concerns and review the preliminary designs. More than 100 people attended a public information session to learn more about the design of the new facility to be built on the old Coach Inn property. The 18,000 square foot building would include a small auditorium, children’s and teen rooms and collections, naturally lighted reading areas and a cafe. Additional public sessions will be scheduled in the future to help people understand the reasoning behind the modern design set in the historic Milford business district. Looking on is Tracey Hummer, director of communications at Frederic Schwartz Architects of New York City.
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explained.

The drive to construct a new main branch got a boost a couple of years ago, when the library received a generous gift from a patron to locate a new facility in the borough of Milford. Shortly after that, Syracuse said the Building Task Force was established to oversee the planning, design, funding and construction of the new facility.

FROM INSIDE OUT

The group, she said, talked with librarians, library planners, architects and other experts to find out what is going on in library design. To try to determine what the community wants in a new main branch, Syracuse said the library conducted 10 focus groups last summer with 120 people from around the county participating.

Through this process, she noted, the Task Force established specific objectives, from which the architects participating in the design competition would create their designs. “In a very real sense, it has been designed from the inside out,” she said.

The new library, the task force told the architects in the competition, should be appropriately sized and wired as an administrative hub for the library system, efficient to operate, provide community space, be a green building in homage to the county’s conservation legacy. It must also contribute to the fine architectural history, make good use of the exquisite site along the Sawkill Creek and be interesting and engaging to visit. And of course, it has to stay within the budget.

The new library will be a gateway to information and technology,” Syracuse said of the design.

Architect Frederic Schwartz said his design is intended to act a bridge between the two very different aspects of the former Coach Inn property on East Harford Street, which fronts on the Historic District on one side and natural beauty of the creek and hillside on the other. “This site is a rare gift,” he said.

PUBLIC BUILDINGS

Schwartz said he studied the other public building in Milford, which is back from the street and are fronted but public green spaces like the Court have picturesque qualities. The new and incorporated design elements reflective of the symmetry in buildings like the Milford School Building.

The building will have a two-story center section set about 100 paces back from Harford Street, with the parking split along the two sides to break up the “sea of cars.” A porte-cochere protects the entrance, and the outer sides will be just a single story so as not to overwhelm the residential buildings it abuts, Schwartz explained.

For the first time, Schwartz showed an architects renderings of the street-sides, where he said he would be heavily land-sapped, and maintain the existing trees.

The cantilevered building, reminiscent of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, juts out a bit over the Sawkill “to be in the trees,” he said, and, it bears large windows designed not only to provide natural light but also for passive solar heating. They will also reflect the images of the trees making the building seem a part of the natural setting that surrounds it.

The design also incorporates a good deal of sustainable technology including a green roof, which Schwartz said helps lower operating costs and stormwater volumes. He added his firm will be on-site throughout the building process to be sure the design is properly executed. There will also be permeable paving, stormwater retention facilities, efficient mechanical systems, etc.

In all, he said the design is expected to achieve Silver status in the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) through the US Green Building Council, which provides standards for what constitutes a green building. The goal, according to Schwartz is to use 25 percent less energy than conventional building techniques.

FOR THE FUTURE

Milford resident Valerie Myer, who also serves on the borough’s Shade Tree Commission, said the town has a unique architectural history with eclectic styles representing several periods of history. “This is one of our generations,” she explained, noting it is important to leave a modern building in such a beautiful site. “This is the most important building in the last 100 years and may be far into the future.

She also suggested Schwartz abandon his preliminary plans to plant gingko biloba trees in favor of the native sycamore, which Schwartz immediately adopted in his description of the green space in front of the building.

Local building Ed Nokes Sr. said he was “apprehensive” when he first saw a picture of the design, but said his views changed after seeing the presentation. He noted as a builder he understands the choices Schwartz has made, but said many people do not, and much of the funding for the building will be coming from private con-

tributions.

“IT’s going to take a lot of money,” he said, adding, “you need people to get behind (the design).”

Syracuse said she and the Building Task Force, as well as the Library board of directors, recognize the difficulty of clearly communicating the complexities of the design and intend to hold a number of such public sessions to educate residents and potential donors as well as seek comments on the design.

TRADITIONAL DESIGN?

But not everyone supports the design, one Milford resident said he took exception to being left out of the process until this point, noting the design is not an historic building and does not belong in the historic town. He also questioned whether the design can gain a recommendation for approval from the Architectural Review Board in the borough.

Syracuse said the informal discussions with the ARB have just begun, but noted the architect had a copy of the design guidelines and believes it addresses them. It was also noted the design guidelines specifically discourages imitating historic designs.

Another resident who called himself a “preservationist,” said he loves the traditional designs in Milford, but said the town has a “tradition of extraordinary architecture of the building. There is a disconnect between what is comfortable to use vs. building something for tomorrow that will attract young people.”

Syracuse agreed. “People have to use the library for it to fulfill its purpose,” she concluded.

When they do, she expects the library to increase its main collection of books from 20,000 to 30,500 with similar jumps in main collection media, teen books and media and children’s books and media. The new branch would have seating for 80 adults, where just seven can sit in the current space. The younger students will have large spaces in the new library including a room the size of whole Milford branch as it stands now. And that doesn’t even include the program room which seats 30.

The number of public access computers is expected to increase from just three right now to 24 in the future. The administration work area will grow from a meager 561 square feet now to 2,445 in the new facility, with seven rooms for seating up to 210 people and elevator access to both floors.

Web note: Questions or comments about this article should be directed to news@neagle.com.