Crowd Packs County Courthouse For New Library Design Forum

By Ken Baumel

MILFORD — Pike Library unveiled the full architectural design for a proposed new Pike central library at a public meeting held at the Pike Courthouse on Monday evening.

The meeting was the first of several planned for this summer by the Library Building Task Force to enlist public support for the building design concept, according to Pike Central Library Task Force Chairperson and Library Board Member Maleyne M. Syracuse, who moderated the meeting.

The meeting attracted close to 175 people, many of whom offered comments after the presentation by library architect Frederic Schwartz of Frederic Schwartz of New York City.

Schwartz said that he has been professor of architecture at Ivy League universities, Harvard, Yale, and University of Pennsylvania. He said that 20th century major architects, such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Alvar Alto, and his professor Joseph Esherick, influenced his designs as did Thomas Jefferson, president and architect of Monticello.

High-profile buildings designed by Schwartz include the Staten Island Ferry Terminal (Whitehall Terminal) in Manhattan, the Chennai (Madras) Airport Terminal in India, and he is the design team leader on the adaptive re-use design for the World Trade Center in New Orleans.

Following an intensive competition involving 100 architects, Schwartz’s cantilevered design was selected in February from the nine architects who actually submitted final designs.

All nine designs were modern, not one was traditional. The proposed Pike Library interior was inspired by Alto, who used a lot of glass, light, and atriums. The exterior was inspired primarily by Frank Lloyd Wright, who frequently used cantilevers, in which the top portion of the building extends beyond and outward from the building base. Wright also likes to use plantings or gravel on the roof of some buildings, including one located in Dingman Township. Schwartz said that his Library design would have vegetation on a flat roof to soften the potential hard edge of the roof line and to better blend the building into the landscape.

The landscape on the proposed Library lot at 4th Street and East Harford overlooks a ravine that leads to the Sawkill Creek. The 18,000-square-foot, 3-story building, would be set back over 150 feet, have parking in front on either side of the building, and have energy efficient green designs to use solar light to heat in winter. The extensive glass would allow people to interact more closely to nature, according to Schwartz.

During the meeting, one person commented that some of Wright’s cantilevered buildings collapsed over time. Schwartz responded, “I didn’t get to where I got by building buildings that collapse. My designs won’t collapse.”

A Pike Task Force jury of 12 selected the Schwartz design. Six of the jury members were from Pike County and six were from outside the area, having expertise in architecture, history, libraries, construction, design, and cost analysis.

Regulatory Process Syracuse said that the building could the Schwartz design selection, though a contract with Schwartz is not in place yet. The contract can’t be concluded because the Library Board must go through the Milford Borough regulatory process, starting with the Architectural Review Board (ARB).

Some ARB members, such as Beth Kelley, have already questioned whether the proposed Schwartz modern design concept can comply with the Borough’s historic district ordinance.

Syracuse said in an interview on Tuesday that the Library design team (Continued on Page 19)
presented the Schwartz design at a Preliminary Concept Design meeting at ARB on March. At the April ARB meeting, ARB retained its own design consultant, John Milner Associates. Peter Benton of that company commented that the Schwartz design footprint is too large, that parking should be in back and not in front of the building, and that the design is too contemporary and out of place with the prevailing 19th century borough building designs.

Syracuse said that the Library Board and Schwartz are ready to negotiate and work with ARB in upcoming meetings.

Syracuse also said that the Library experts, such as George Thomas, a leading Pennsylvania historic architectural specialist, consider that the design can meet ARB standards and comply with borough regulations. She concluded, “We and our experts and advisors believe that it complies with the building guidelines and will work with ARB to demonstrate our points.”

Alastair Gordon, a Milford resident and New York Times writer, said that the project should be able to meet all borough ARB and regulatory guidelines.

In other comments, Milford Shade Tree Commissioner Valerie Meyer, who is also an author of a book on historic buildings in Milford Borough, said that in each era, Milford Borough has attracted outstanding architects who have left one or more outstanding designs. The Schwartz design could be the most outstanding design in Milford the past 100 years and into the future. But, she asked that native trees, such as sycamore, be planted rather than the proposed ginkgo.

Former United Way President Alan Dolge questioned the flat roof design and use of vegetation because many buildings with flat roofs in Pike (Delaware Valley school buildings) have historically developed leaks not long after construction. Schwartz said that his building roofs don’t leak and that a hands-on approach monitoring construction, use of good materials, prevents future leaks.

Milford Resident Tony Grigal complained that with the large Library building, traffic in Milford would increase. This and other impacts should have been first presented to the Borough residents before the plan was sent out to bid. Even though the project is for serving the growing needs of Pike residents, the Borough residents would be the ones who are impacted the most.

Schwartz asked Grigal if new building design should have stopped in 1880.

Cathy Maxaner suggested moving the building out of the borough and closer to Grey Towers in Milford Township, where there may be more room to meet future growth in Pike. Syracuse noted that the $1 million endowment to the Library for a new building stipulated that the building must be in the borough. Therefore, unless the Library gets more money and chooses not to use the endowment, the project is locked into the Borough.

But, regarding funding for the project, Syracuse said in an interview that the project would need public and private funds. The Endowment is only part of the financial package. Money comes from the state, county, and Pike municipalities, and private donations.

Syracuse said that recently, the Library held a fund-raiser at Pocono Environmental Education Center (PEEC) in Lehman Township that $300,000 in pledges were raised at that meeting and immediately after it, setting what she and others consider a record for fund-raisers in Pike. This shows the public support is strong. And, the meeting at the Courthouse also indicated strong support for this project, according to Syracuse. Now, if the Library can get past Milford Borough ARB, the Borough Council, and all other regulatory hurdles, the project can fly.

**Library Overview**

Syracuse gave an overview of the project at the Courthouse presentation, including the need for a larger and new facility and need to have public input. Last year the Library enlisted input from 120 county residents who were part of a focus group. She covered objectives to be realized through the design: more space, mainly improve service, more books, and more space for programs, public meetings, and educational programs. Even entertainment could be offered, such as working with Black Bear Film Festival and Milford Music Festival during their annual events.

Finally, the distinctive building and large public meeting rooms would help local businesses by attracting more people. The building would therefore enhance the economic, social, and educational development of the area, according to Syracuse.

Syracuse said that the design and the impact on the community for such a distinctive building would meet immediate growth needs and serve the public well into the future. In answer to a question about whether the Schwartz building is large enough for future growth, Syracuse said that population in fast growing areas such as Lehman Township could be served by local branches designed for the needs of the local community.

Several residents objected to the modern design and wanted a design more in keeping with the historic look of Milford. Tracey Hummer of Schwartz’s office commented after the meeting that people would be able to look out from the Library to the historic buildings.

Wendy Reading, an adjacent property owner, expressed concern about the Library looming over her building. Schwartz said that he would meet with all nearby property owners to discuss specific concerns and may adjust the building design, if necessary.

**Nikles Speaks Out**

Ed Nikles, Sr. said that originally he did not like the design but after this evening’s presentation that he thought the building was a fine design.

Sean Strub said he was exhilarated about the modern design and that young people would be more likely to relate to it.

Finally, one Borough resident asked if the building would invite bats nesting and birds roosting. The Borough Hall building had a severe bat infestation a few years ago, making it host to allegedly the largest brown bat population in a building in Pennsylvania.

Schwartz said that he could incorporate deterrents to birds roosting, but would have to study how to deal with (brown) bats (which are a protected species). Bats may be a minor issue in the total scheme of what is being presented, but in Milford Borough, small issues can mushroom into major proportions, according to some borough residents.

Nevertheless Syracuse and Schwartz said that they are confident after the turn out and comments at the Courthouse and look forward to taking the next steps to get the project moving forward.