New library to be on 2018 ballot

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LAPEER — Voters will be asked to approve a $12.5-million bond issue in 2018 to fund construction of a new Lapeer library that would be six times bigger than the existing Marguerite deAngeli Library and open in 2020.

Library director Melissa Malcolm presented a brief overview of the project to the Lapeer County Board of Commissioners during its committee of the whole meeting.

The idea is to ask voters to approve a proposal of between .45 and .5 mills for the next 20-25 years. A brochure handed out at Thursday's meeting claims that would equate to about $25 annually for voters, though some commissioners questioned the figure's accuracy.

Malcolm said library officials plan to have the issue on the August 2018 ballot.

"The process of looking at the need for a new library building, of choosing a site, of selecting the architect has not been a quick one," she said. "The process has been measured and unhurried."

The Marguerite deAngeli Library was originally a city library, but when the city and county library

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systems merged in the 1970s, it became the library district's main branch. Malcolm said if the library moves into a new home, ownership of the building would likely revert to the city.

If the project moves forward, a new library would be built on 8.5 acres recently purchased from the City of Lapeer at the southwest corner of DeMille Boulevard and Davison Road.

The new library would include a main floor that is 35,000 square feet and another floor that is 15,000 square feet, dwarfing the deAngeli's total 8,100 square feet.

According to Malcolm, the need for a new and improved library can be traced publicly to at least 2005, when it was mentioned during a Lapeer City Commission meeting.

Library staff and patrons have made do with an inadequate building for years, she said.

The Marguerite deAngeli Library at Main Street and West Nepessing saw more than 129,000 visits in 2016. Patrons borrowed more than 182,000 library materials from the district last year and the public access computers and WiFi network were used more than 65,000 times.

The brochure that Malcolm handed out at Thursday's county board meeting included a bullet-point list addressing the reasons a new library is needed:

- Limited parking. The library has 28 spots.
- One meeting room. Limits ability to offer more programs, attendance.
- Not enough shelf space. For every new book that comes into the library, an older book must be discarded.
- Children's room and teen area are too small.
- Lack of space for new services.
- Not enough public computers and no privacy.
- Very little comfortable seating.
- Circulation desk is inefficient.

The proposed new library, said Malcolm, will include more space for activities, a production studio that would allow the recording of music, a much larger meeting room that can be divided to accommodate two simultaneous group gatherings, six to seven enclosed study rooms for students, a history room and space to house the deAngeli collection of dolls, artifacts and manuscripts as well as many more computers for adults, children and teenagers.

In total, said Malcolm, current plans call for 110 seats in the new library. The library might also include a coffee shop from which patrons can purchase a beverage to enjoy in comfortable reading areas.

"We anticipate great demand for the new services that we will be able to offer," Malcolm said.

In late February, a Traverse City-based fundraising team visited with community representatives in a pre-feasibility meeting to gauge interest in a new library to assist them in their plans to seek major donors that will help offset the total cost of the library project.

The library hired Zrimec and Wick LLC, a consulting company that specializes in partnering with non-profit organizations in their fund development efforts.

Lenny Schneider, Lapeer County commissioner, asked Malcolm if other buildings had been considered, including the former Lapeer West High School.

"I'm wondering if the library (officials) have ever explored partnering with Lapeer Community Schools to perhaps share a building," Schneider asked.

Malcolm said planners did look at costs associated with renovating the former E.T. White Building and the former Irwin Elementary School building on Second Street in Lapeer now used as the administration offices of Lapeer Community Schools. The administration offices would have relocated to the former high school under that scenario.

But, she said, renovating the E.T. White Building would have been too expensive and the cost of renovating the former Irwin Elementary is about the same as building a new library.

Malcolm pointed to a survey of nearly 400 library district residents who said that they preferred the construction of a new library, versus the purchase and renovation of a standing structure.

Lapeer County Commissioner Ian Kempf had questions about funding for a potential new library — specifically, what information was used to determine the claim in the brochure that costs would be about $25 annually per household.

Malcolm said it was a figure determined by the library's finance advisor.

"I would suggest either putting in a millage rate, or what you're basing that $25 on," Kempf told Malcolm.

Malcolm said it probably wouldn't be known exactly until next May, when the most up-to-date information from the county's equalization department is available.

The project architect, said Malcolm, will hold a series of community meetings once plans and drawings are drafted to solicit feedback and allow people to get a look at the proposed facility. Malcolm said those meetings likely will begin in autumn.