

Bloomfield libraries plan would reconstruct Prosser and enlarge McMahan

Goode, Steven . Hartford Courant (Online) , Hartford: Tribune Publishing Company, LLC. May 25, 2021.

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FULL TEXT

After several stops and starts in recent years, plans for modernized libraries in Bloomfield appear to be a reality, pending approval from voters.

The town council Monday received a presentation on plans for about \$29 million in construction costs to reconstruct and enlarge the Prosser Library and renovate and expand the McMahan libraries at their current sites. The plan includes \$22.6 million to construct a 27,800 square-foot, two-floor Prosser Library, including a 110-foot bridge over Wash Brook.

Construction of the McMahan branch would cost \$5.9 million for an 8,900-square-foot, single-floor building. Construction would begin in late 2022 with a 16-month process at the Prosser site and 10-month process at McMahan.

If approved by the town council in June, the proposal would go to a referendum Nov. 2.

Library Board of Directors Chairman Greg Davis gave the council an overview with artists' renderings of the proposed new buildings created by TSKP Studio Monday.

"We made a commitment that we couldn't do one without the other," Davis said. "There is a need for two state of the art libraries."

Longtime Republican Council member Joseph Merritt said he is not a fan of the initial design concepts. Both featured libraries are dominated by high glass walls and a modern look, which Merritt said would be fine in an urban setting but did not fit with the town's effort to maintain a small New England feel.

"I just don't think it fits into the center of town," Merritt said Monday. "It would be a shame if it went down [at referendum] because of a radical design."

Mayor Suzette DeBeatham-Brown said she would like to see more brick work incorporated into the next phase of the design, which is expected to be brought back to the council for its June 14 meeting.

But council member Danielle Wong disagreed.

"I love the design," she said. "It brightens up the center. We have a bunch of brick blocks in the center."

Wong said she also appreciated that the McMahan branch was included in the plans.

Regardless of the design, library director Elizabeth Lane said the upgrades at both buildings are necessary. The Prosser branch was built in 1965 and the McMahan branch was built in 1972.

"It's time," she said.

Lane listed several issues at the heart of the need for new buildings, including: flooding at the Prosser branch; poor accessibility and visibility; a lack of study, meeting and collaborative spaces; safety concerns and a lack of parking.

Steven Goode can be reached at sgoode@courant.com.

DETAILS

Subject:	Councils; Libraries
Publication title:	Hartford Courant (Online); Hartford
Publication year:	2021
Publication date:	May 25, 2021
Section:	Community - Bloomfield
Publisher:	Tribune Publishing Company, LLC
Place of publication:	Hartford
Country of publication:	United States, Hartford
Publication subject:	General Interest Periodicals--United States
Source type:	Blogs, Podcasts, & Websites
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
ProQuest document ID:	2531844219
Document URL:	https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/bloomfield-libraries-plan-would-reconstruct/docview/2531844219/se-2?accountid=41903
Copyright:	Copyright Tribune Publishing Company, LLC May 25, 2021
Last updated:	2021-05-26
Database:	Hartford Courant

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