BCML Facility Project Update

## History of the Library

The library started in Bath County in 1949 as an outreach effort of the women's club. Over the next few years and with support from the community it slowly developed into a public library located in what is still called “The Pocket” on the south side of the courthouse. The library received help from the state of Kentucky and made a push to promote a bookmobile service. In 1953 the library purchased its first bookmobile, a converted, green GMC Panel Truck. That green truck traveled around town to local schools, bringing new books for the community to enjoy. Betty Bailey, and Tom Byron used to drive that bookmobile in early in the 1950’s. Kids of all ages still light up when they see the Bookmobile driving by.

By 1964 The Library had moved across the road to the Old Owingsville School. (Currently our Fiscal Court Annex.) However, the library was looking for a more permanent home and the library bought half of the building that is our present location. Over the years we’ve expanded. We have converted two adjoining buildings and renovated the facility a few times to make it work for programs and events, but the library has been dealing with the limitations of a 100-year-old facility.

By 2016 the library had begun holding significantly large programs with more than 2,000 people come through the building for the Haunted Library program, over 500 for the Eclipse Event back in 2017, and a continuous stream of eager Summer Readers during June and July as well as many other programs. These programs used the building at its maximum capacity.

The library has been lucky to receive national and regional museum displays and significant grants that give us the opportunity to do even more programming.

However, a facility that is over 100 years old is bound to have some significant issues. Though library staff have diligently cared and looked after the present building for over 50 years now, some things need to be updated. Simply put, there isn’t enough room to achieve the library’s dream of being a real community space shared by everyone.

## Expansion of services 2010-

Around 2010 The Library board started casually looking for property, not seriously, just keeping their eyes open on the market, and preparing for a future that would mean another facility update.

Meanwhile, in 2014 The Library was able to work with the City of Sharpsburg to provide services through a new library branch as well as a new and updated bookmobile.

## Assessment of Community Needs -

The board also started to fine tune what exactly they were looking for in a new place. It needed to be affordable, but more importantly: They wanted something that would be within a walkable distance for as many families as possible in the community; something that would be close enough to the schools that kids would be able to walk, bike, or skate to the library. The site would need to have ample parking allowing parents with children the ability to come in and out without worrying too much about traffic, and a place that was accessible.

The library began a strategic plan with the goal to provide the best resources to benefit the community. While doing work on the strategic plan, the Library did in person and online surveys of community members to tell us what the most important issues were in Bath County, not only what was important to them personally but what would best benefit the entire county. We took those answers and worked on creating service responses that would be able resolve the issues citizens are concerned about. So, what exactly where those issues?

First and foremost, Owingsville needs a safe place for kids and young adults to gather. A place where drugs are absent. A place where all community member, can utilize the tools they need to access good jobs and economic opportunity. A place where we can support families, gather in meeting and study rooms, create community collaborations, and more! We took these responses and worked them into the foundation of our future facility plans.

## Library Property and Evaluation

The Library started to seriously consider a new facility and was actively looking at locations in 2017. The Library compared sites based on the key factors we identified in our strategic plan. When we compared sites we found that a site’s asking price was more than the library could afford, or the land wouldn’t be quite right. The library even looked at the pros, cons, and costs of doing another renovation for the current building.

When the property the library purchased became available. It was in town, close to the schools, walkable, and would allow for parking. The library purchased the property knowing that it would need to be fully evaluated.

We hired an architectural firm, Clotfelter-Samokar Architects from Lexington. While we waited for their report on the property to assess its feasibility, we took field trips to other libraries around the state, to see what they did in similar situations, what their community needed, and what we might be able to learn from them.

After reviewing the various possibilities and their strengths and weaknesses, the library board talked for months about what options were available and what was the most responsible and cost-effective way to steward the community resources they had been given. The Library does not receive significant funding from the federal government, or even the state.

The Library commissioned the architects to assess the site, and whether a modern library could be built on the site and what the costs might be to build on the site. The study included a draft of what a possible building would look like, including a hypothetical layout for a new library facility. A new building that could support healthy families, give people access to economic opportunity, and have the space and resources for community collaboration.

The feasibility study broke down the cost of a new library, what needed to happen to the new property and what some of the benefits would be for the community and for the library.

While the Library has been able to move forward in purchasing land. Funding any construction will be a long term project. During this waiting period the library will continue to do what it has always done: Diligently working to provide resources to our community. The Library will be sharing information about the process of the project over the next few weeks and working to ensure that the community is well informed about any significant facility plans.

Please continue to follow our website and social media pages as we share more BCML Facility Project Updates.

Michael J. Richter - Director