

What's Next for the Library? by Cathy Brant, *former President of The Friends*

After attending the Palm Springs Public Library Planning Retreat at the Palm Springs Convention Center on January 29th, I left impressed by the wide range of participants from various civic and non-profit organizations devoted to serving the community.

My takeaway is that our Library remains a strong, vibrant entity led by enthusiastic and creative people. The talented staff continues to offer programs and services, welcoming all the members of the community.

But our Library sits at a crossroad. The building itself is in desperate need of renovation of the heating and air conditioning systems, plumbing, and the re-organization of space for the library's many zones – books, computers, quiet spaces for reading, and space for the many adult, children and teen programs.

We have three options: 1) do nothing, 2) renovate and enlarge the existing site, or 3) build an entirely new library at some yet-to-be-determined location. The group in attendance vetoed the first option and then found itself almost evenly divided between renovation (28) and new construction (32).

Ironically, this outcome reminded me of a similar renovation plan five years ago, at the end of the *first* planning session about our Library's future. In addition to reconfiguring book shelves, it resulted in the following:

1. Spacious meeting rooms for tutoring, mentoring, meetings of community groups, creative experiences, and adult literacy
2. An auditorium capable of housing large crowds
3. Quiet spaces for reading, study, and computer use
4. A store for the Friends of the Palm Springs Library
5. A snack / coffee bar
6. Resource areas for social services
7. A customer service area
8. Additional parking

At that time, the City Council was, in fact, ready to move on a plan (designed by the renovators of the COD/Palm Desert Library), when COD stepped in with their plan to open a Western Valley Campus here and offered space to build a new Library.

Five years later, we are at the same place, only our Library building is in much worse shape. Which way to go? Renovate and expand, build a new building elsewhere, or take the offer of space that COD is offering? And what happens to the Library building in the meantime?

Also, we must not forget that our Library is an historical icon designed by famed architect William Cody at the height of his career. It represents a unique example of 1970s Modernism.

And let's be practical: where is the money coming from? Are Measure J monies going to pay for it? Will the new PS Library Foundation raise the funds? Or the City? Or will our now independent Public Library be funded privately, making us beholden to specialized interests instead of the community's genuine needs?

Before we decide to spend tens of millions of dollars, we need to take a fresh look at that old plan. It used the existing building and reconfigured the space, *easily housing all the Library's needs*, including an Auditorium, entrances on the building's North and South sides, and an additional parking lot entrance off of Sunrise Way at the Shopping Center.

Ultimately, it's time to check in with the community about this. And my hunch is that we'll make the smarter choice to value the past and regenerate an important historic icon for the next generation – *at half the cost* of a proposed new facility somewhere other than the center of town.