Title: Why Do Anything to Our Library?

The Thomas Memorial Library Study Committee was charged with defining a library program to serve the Cape Elizabeth community for the next 30 years as well as developing a conceptual plan for any proposed improvements to library facilities. As a result of the substantial input from the Cape Elizabeth community, consultants, and engineers, the TML Design Concept Final Report (July 31, 2009) enumerates three (3) design alternatives as detailed below. In addition, we also carefully considered the “status quo” as an alternative.

**Why do anything to TML?** We concluded that the “status quo” is NOT a viable option! An article in *The Cape Courier*, Nov. 20, 2010, titled “TML Trustees Seek Comment”, outlined the architectural and engineering shortcomings of the current library as well as key attributes that the Cape Elizabeth community wants in our library.

In order to prepare ourselves for our assignment, The Study Committee visited local libraries that have recently completed major additions or newly constructed a replacement library. It was not apparent to us at the time, but we would soon be comparing TML’s ability to safely, efficiently and effectively deliver services to that of neighboring libraries. We also came to realize that TML has found many ways to provide adequate service through resourcefulness and “work around” techniques. However, there are practical limits to everything.

As characterized in the Final Report: *“The deficiencies of the current library complex are significant, and in some cases, pose unacceptable hazards. Furthermore, there are negative long term cost implications of doing nothing. The fragmented nature of the existing structure wastes a very costly resource, i.e., staff time. “In addition, the shortcomings of the current building seriously hamper the Library’s efforts to offer high-quality, 21st century library services. Finally, interaction with a large number of community residents leads to the conclusion that many people want the Library to play an expanded role as a center of community life in Cape Elizabeth. Doing so within the confines of the existing structure will be next to impossible.”*

Spending additional money on this valued Town Department to repair and/or upgrade these aging structures is not readily available. The next time you visit the library, stop and look at the exterior. Would you allow these conditions to exist at your home or business? Go inside and walk around the library with fresh eyes. Focus your attention on the structure, on the collections, physical access, work conditions, etc. If you were an advisor to those responsible for current and future operation of this facility, would you recommend remedial action? Yes, we think so too!

Alternatives:

1. Reprogramming Existing Space:
The space reprogramming concept was rejected because well over $1 million could be spent addressing some of the many structural, mechanical and accessibility issues with little gain in functionality.
2. Building an addition that reuses some of the existing structure(s):
Each of the members of The Study Committee desired the preservation of the Pond Cove School building, or its façade. However, this alternative does not correct the existing deficiencies due to “site” constraints. Additionally, the estimated cost range to implement this alternative fell in a range between $5 million and $7.5 million.
3. Building a New Facility (“Clean Slate” Scenario):
A new facility offers a number of significant advantages, including, but not limited to: lower on-going maintenance costs, its open floor plan lends itself to re-purposing in the future, and the possibility of preserving & moving at least the original 1849 structure to other town owned property. The estimated cost range for implementing the “clean slate” concept was nearly identical to the cost of the addition scenario: clean slate costs (in 2009 dollars) would be between $5.1 million and $7.8 million.

After extensive deliberation, the Library Study Committee concluded that alternative #3) Building a New Facility, represents the best balance between providing the desired services, the flexibility to accommodate unknown future needs, and good stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

As always, it is our goal to maintain an open dialogue and ensure awareness to the challenges that we face, so we can formulate potential solutions together. The Board of Trustees welcomes your comments.