

Minutes

Merger Committee Meeting

September 10, 2018

Minot Public Library

Members Present: Ryan Ackerman, Janet Anderson, Tom Barry, Kerrienne Boetcher, Deb Fauske, Lisa Olson, Jim Rostad, Alan Walter and Tami Ware

Also Present: Stephan Podrygula, Melody Shelkey and Odessa Slyter

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 pm by Lisa Olson.

Barry moved approval of the minutes from the last meeting and Rostad seconded. Motion approved.

Anderson explained that all members were provided copies of the resolutions signed and approved by both the Ward County Commissioners and Minot City Council. Ackerman asked for clarification as to if the resolutions were both the same and Anderson said they were.

Olson moved onto to Vision/Goals and Anderson clarified that one of the primary questions she and Boetcher have received is WHERE the library would be if combined so they would appreciate the committee's vision on this. Anderson shared that the WCPL has 45,801 titles in its collection and MPL has 176,018. Boetcher had provided Anderson with a list of all 45,801 items and MPL staff have compared 2,885 of those items to the MPL holdings. Of these, MPL only has 41% of the same titles as WCPL. Anderson said that to check the remaining 40,000+ titles would be very time-consuming and Ackerman said that he felt this sampling was enough and that we could assume approximately 40% duplication. The committee agreed.

Discussion followed indicating that there would not be room for MPL to move to WCPL, so the best option may be to combine at the MPL location. Ackerman shared that a rough estimate of square footage is that WCPL has approximately 5,400 square feet and MPL has approximately 40,000 square feet. This translates into approximately 13% or 3,000 square feet of additional space needed. Olson reminded the committee that we must also consider the additional space needed for patrons if the patron usage increases. Rostad stated that he anticipated the WCPL would move into the MPL with duplicates and additional books being brought to Kenmare for a possible expansion.

Ackerman asked Ware if an expansion in Kenmare was possible and she said that she would look into it, but believed the space adjacent to the current location was unavailable.

Olson told the committee that the original IEDC recommendation was for the libraries to combine downtown and asked if this was still a consideration. Barry explained that the City is in talks with owners of two downtown buildings, but that nothing has been finalized and nothing would be quickly determined. In addition, the challenges posed with moving to a new location would be cost and what to do with the current MPL.

Walter asked if any of the Trinity buildings were an option and Barry said they have reviewed these, but based on the layout (specifically the large quantity of smaller rooms) it would be difficult. Rostad said that he is unsure of moving into a new building as MPL was built to be a library and serves well as a library. Ackerman agreed and believes MPL is best suited remain the primary library with the potential to move in the future.

Fauske told the committee that if a public vote is needed we would have to make sure that the public would “buy into” the idea and a move to a new location may be hard to sell. Walter agreed and said that the resolution was changed so that the goal of a merger would ultimately be to DECREASE cost to the public.

Barry asked Anderson and Boetcher if the current MPL building would work if the libraries were merged. Anderson said yes, but with some costs even if it is simply repurpose existing space. Anderson explained that the Minot Public Library is already running out of space for circulating items and there would need to be some creative solutions to make space for even more. In addition, the primary concern both libraries have is housing the bookmobile and its inventory. Boetcher explained the current process for the bookmobile and said that if it is housed outside of the library (as it currently is) the inventory is not refreshed as often and patron reserves are not always completed in a timely manner.

Rostad asked if there would be a possible expansion to bookmobile services, including service within Minot and extended hours, if there was a merger. Boetcher explained that there would need to be a change to the current schedule and additional staff, but both she and Anderson said that expanded bookmobile services was a priority for them. Barry shared his experience with bookmobile services in the evenings and weekends and said he thought it would be a great service for the citizens.

Fauske asked if there was any thought about using the current WCPL for other “parts” of library services such as a technology center. Anderson and Boetcher both said that they had considered using this space as a Makerspace and technology center. Ackerman said that if we are considering using other locations we should also consider more creative locations such as the Magic City Discovery Center or downtown locations for library services. Barry said that this could even be considered as the City looks at other locations downtown. Ackerman said that this could fit in with the “buzz” to have an incubator downtown and Barry said that we could consider collaboration with POEM and other underused businesses. Walter pointed out that the IEDC recommendation was to put the libraries together, but that this doesn’t mean they have to be combined. However, the resolution approved by the Commission and Council did specify that the goal of a merger would be to decrease spending.

Finally, Rostad said he would like to see the libraries combined at the current MPL location with the possible consideration for a move in the future. Barry seconded this and said that while the idea of having different services throughout town would be interesting, it could prove to be more inconvenient and people may prefer a “one stop shop.”

Olson moved the discussion to item VIII on the agenda which was the Attorney General's Office Response. Anderson distributed the e-mail forwarded from the ND State Librarian which indicated that the Assistant Attorney General interpreted that the NDCC requires a public election be held. Olson said that this would mean waiting until the 2020 general election or holding a special election which would cost money. Ackerman asked if the Morton County-Mandan Library merger was voted on through an election and Boetcher said that it was.

Ackerman asked if a vote would still be necessary if one entity was dissolved and the other entity took over its services. If this were to occur, there would have to be a contract allowing that the governing body of the dissolved entity would still pay toward these services. Barry seconded this thought. Anderson explained that in a meeting with the County Auditors and City Finance Director, the question became what the mill levy to support library services would be. The County can only levy up to 4 mills (they currently receive under 3) while the City of Minot has no restrictions due to their Home Rule Charter (MPL generally receives between 6 and 7 mills). If one library dissolves that would remove their \$30,000+ in State Aid from the revenue and if the mill levy for one or both of the libraries drops below its 3 year average, that would also make them ineligible for State Aid. Anderson explained that they are still waiting for clarification on the State Aid and will be requesting a formal opinion from the Attorney General's office.

Anderson handed out a packet of comparisons between the two libraries. The first two pages included a comparison of number of staff and what the salaries and benefits would look like if merged under the county versus if merged under the city. She explained that this accounted for three anticipated retirements by moving existing staff into those positions and not replacing those staff positions. Fauske and Ware both shared that they didn't want to see cost savings on "the back of employees" and Rostad said that he imagined if the libraries merged under the City of Minot there may be a loss of County employees due to benefits.

Ackerman said that he agreed with Rostad and that we would need to consider an increase in county employees' salaries to offset benefits if necessary. However, he also said that positions will need to be reviewed for elimination and that this would hopefully be taken care of through attrition. Anderson clarified that the proposed salary comparison did not replace three positions or include substitutes which the WCPL currently uses.

Barry asked what "enhanced services" would mean in terms of expense if we were looking at reducing overall staff through attrition. He said that we should work to look more closely into actual costs including what an increase of costs and salaries might look like and compared to the return on investment the public would receive. Ware emphasized that expansion of bookmobile services would be especially seen as a positive outcome of a potential merger.

Olson wrapped up the conversation by saying that the committee needed to provide some direction, especially in the context of a timeframe. Barry requested that Anderson and Boetcher provide the following:

- Cost analysis of expanded bookmobile services

- Cost analysis (savings) of removing duplicative services, including subscriptions and book purchasing.
- A more thorough salaries comparison

Rostad directed the staff to dig deep and be as thorough as possible. Attendee Stephan Podrygula shared that he thought the committee was on a very good track and emphasized that he believed the direction being provided by the committee was very useful. Ackerman asked that when budgets are being compared to combine the WCPL and MPL into one budget to compare to a potential merged system.

A next meeting was set for Monday, October 15th at 2:00 pm to tentatively be held at the Ward County Administration building if space is available. Ackerman said he would try to look into the space analysis more and would like to meet with Anderson and Boetcher at the end of September to discuss as he will not be available for the October 15th meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 3:30 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Janet Anderson, acting secretary