



FEASIBILITY STUDY REPORT

KALKASKA COUNTY LIBRARY

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A Needs Assessment was conducted for the Kalkaska County Library in 2002. Many points that had been *felt* by the library board were verified. Top among these was the need for more space. In fact, the Needs Assessment suggested a square footage of 12,000 square feet and allowing for growth patterns in the County's future, to 22,000 square feet within twenty five years. The building that now houses the library is under 5,000 square feet; a dramatic gap in *have* and *need*.

Once this data established a need for increased space, the Library Board began to pursue expansion ideas. Many buildings were considered over the next several years, including expansion at the current site, purchase of various buildings around the community which could be remodeled for library use, and empty lots which might be available for construction of a new facility. Each time a push was made for the generation of ideas; there was no accompanying push to act.

In the summer of 2005, the Library Board was ready to come to a decision about the expansion. Mandy Gibson, Advisor for Library Development, was hired as the facilitator to organize representatives from around the county into a Task Force to develop a plan of action. This group was made up of the Library Board, countywide leaders, elected officials, Friends of the Kalkaska Library Board members, local business owners, and other respected members of the geographic area. The Task Force met over a three month time period to sort out all of the ideas that had ever been proposed.

The Task Force narrowed the possible choices to four and divided into study groups to delve into the pros and cons of each one. Collaboration with the Kaliseum, either by adding on to the existing building or constructing a new facility adjacent to the sports complex, with shared access and parking was one.

Since the Village of Kalkaska was also looking for new office and garage space, a second idea was to build a new building in the parking lot between Third and Fourth Streets, which could be shared with the Village.

A third concept to be studied was a consideration of the purchase of the property to the north of the current library which would allow for parking and a sizable two story addition to the building now housing the library.

The fourth idea was to build a new building on Island Lake Road adjacent to the County Annex. This wooded lot of approximately 11 acres would provide not only sufficient space for a new library, but would also allow for the future development of similar services as the county continues to grow.

Each study group presented a plan to the Task Force and many other community leaders in late November of 2005. They provided supporting information for library development on the site they had investigated. This gave opportunity for comparisons of the ideas not only from within the Task Force, but also from the community at large. The Village of Kalkaska in the meantime purchased a new facility for its departments making the examination of a shared new building with the library moot.

The Task Force spent several more weeks continuing to evaluate the merits of the remaining three options considering potential growth, construction costs and accessibility. Local architect, Michael Fitzhugh agreed to look at the sites and give a presentation to the group regarding building projects in general and his opinion of these three sites in particular.

Before a decision could be made about the ideal location, the Library Board was approached by the Village and the Kalkaska Public Schools with two new options. The Village Council now had the previous garage and office complex on Fourth and Walnut Street available for a new use and asked the Library Board to

consider this space for remodeling into a new library. Mr. Fitzhugh and the task force met with representatives of the Village at this location and he gave some ideas for how this building could be restored, turning it into a library.

Dan McKenzie, Superintendent of the Kalkaska Schools also approached the board with an appeal for them to look at the Cherry Street Elementary School. He thought it might become available in the near future and an arrangement could be made for it to be reused as a new library. A representative group of the task force went on a tour of this facility as well.

After many months of work and thorough examination of several ideas, the Task Force and the Library Board reached consensus in February of 2006 that the ideal situation was to build a new 15,000 square foot building on the County owned property on Island Lake Road. The study group looking into this idea had expanded the plan to include a "campus concept" for development. The group envisioned a one mile by one half mile campus from Island Lake Rd on the South to M-72 on the North. The east/west borders would be Kalkaska Road and Birch Street. This concept was based on the premise that sports activities would collect at the northern end of the campus and cultural activities and facilities would anchor the southern end. In between are the schools, governmental agencies and health care. A residential band borders on the east, blending into the retail strip on Cedar Street. The study group had also given serious consideration to green building ideas, and encouraged this method to be part of the plan. Michael Fitzhugh was retained to create a concept drawing of the building, emphasizing green construction techniques.

With this information in hand, a Statement of Need was developed by the Library Board and a Feasibility Study on this proposal was initiated. What follows is a report of that study.

FEASIBILITY STUDY OVERVIEW

As Kalkaska County has continued to grow, conditions at the Kalkaska County Library have become more and more crowded. Consequently the library can no longer adequately address the needs of the county residents facing the challenge of offering more with less space. The staff has been creative in making do, sacrificing work space to keep the public use areas of the library as open as possible. Even so, compared to other libraries in communities the size of Kalkaska County, this library now has only half the necessary space for the current population let alone space to increase library collections and services for the future. For example, space dedicated to children's programming in the existing facility is 76% less than that suggested by library standards. Library seating is woefully inadequate, in fact 81% less than the recommended standard for the current population. This does not encourage adults, youth and children to spend more time at the library.

Before making a final decision on how to address this lack of space, the Kalkaska Library Board knew it needed to gather objective data on the community's perception of the need for a larger facility. It also wanted a firm idea of the probability for support in funding an increased space. To do this, the Board hired Mandy Gibson to conduct a feasibility study designed to not only sample the thoughts of citizens of the county, but also potential area funders. ,

FEASIBILITY STUDY PROCESS

The Kalkaska County Library Board and a smaller Task Force (Attachment 1) met with architect Michael Fitzhugh to establish the basic parameters of an ideal building to occupy the Island Lake Road site. Additionally, Mr. Fitzhugh gathered information from the library staff, consulted the Wisconsin Standards for Library Development, and visited other local libraries. His resulting conceptual plan was

accepted by the Library Board as the tool to use in the feasibility study. (Attachment 2)

The Library Board also accepted a Statement of Need, outlining the need for increased space, the accompanying services and programs that could be offered, and a funding plan. (Attachment 3)

A major component of the feasibility study was open ended interviews with area residents. Library staff members, Library Board members, Friends of the Library members and Task Force members were asked to submit names of potential interviewees. Emphasis was placed on the need for a well rounded list, representative of the residents of the county. Care was taken to include names from all townships in the county; people in leadership positions and people who are not; library users and non-users; those who were believed to be supportive of a new library and those who might not be. Also included were patrons who had previously filled out voluntary opinion questionnaires at the beginning of the process in the fall. (Attachment 4)

The interviews were conducted at the Kalkaska County Annex conference room, so participants could see the potential building site. The Friends of the Library provided hosts to show the concept drawing and a model of the campus plan. Each interviewee was then given one half hour to answer open ended questions about the proposal in a confidential one-on-one interview. Opportunity was given to each person to evaluate the proposed plan and funding potentials. Differing ideas for library expansion were also noted. (Attachment 4)

The combined opinions, concerns, ideas and perceptions of the proposed project have been analyzed. This information along with current demographic data for Kalkaska County and input from area funding and support resources forms the basis for the feasibility study results.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Who participated?

The pool of interviewees included representation from the Village of Kalkaska and every township in the County. Of the total, 42% were from the Village and/or Kalkaska Township. The remainder was spread fairly evenly among the out-county areas. Thirty-five of the participants were in the 50 – 65 age bracket. Seven were under 40, eleven were from 40 – 50, and thirteen were over 65. Although each of the four age segments are relatively close in percentage of the total County population (2004 estimates, Council of Governments), statistics show that the 50+ population is more likely to participate in funding of a public project such as a library. For this reason, this age group was more heavily polled.

The pool of interviewees also reflected a variety of longevity in residency. Twelve of the respondents were lifetime residents, thirty-three had lived in the area more than 20 years, fourteen had been in Kalkaska County from 10 – 20 years and seven were relative newcomers.

Most of the participants had children, many who still live in this area and are also Kalkaska County Library users or potential users.

What is the perception of the community as a whole?

Of the 66 people interviewed, over half responded with high praise for the character of Kalkaska County residents. When asked to describe the “personality” of the people, words like “good people, friendly, helpful, hardworking, great folk, gracious, resourceful” were used. Although these adjectives were most likely attributed to individuals, some examples of pulling together for positive outcomes in group endeavors were also referenced. More than one respondent mentioned the Imagination Station project (a playground

near the Kalkaska Township Hall). Support for other fundraisers and programs like the Relay for Life, Festival of Trees, the Baby Pantry and the Springfield Township Park were mentioned as evidence of this caring attitude. One person said, "Once an idea is accepted, this community will give it's all to succeed."

Conversely, many people characterized the people of the Kalkaska community as negative and unwilling to change. An often used phrase was "a poor self image". A sense that strongly opinionated people with a propensity for divisiveness may keep the area from taking advantage of opportunities for positive growth was often expressed. Apathy coming from a resistance to change and poor attitudes regarding collaborative efforts was also a common theme expressed.

This oppositional viewpoint from the interviewees (sometimes with both sides of this personality expressed by the same person) validates a comment that the community "really rallies around an idea, *good or bad*."

There were many hopeful opinions that this community can change. Several respondents said "there is great potential" here. Most agreed that Kalkaska is a good place to live, but currently it is not offering enough to lure families here.

What were feelings about the economy?

Dozens of those interviewed stressed the poor economy in Kalkaska County as a hindrance to proposals like this one from the library. Views were that industry is on a decline, numerous people are on fixed incomes, people are struggling to make basic ends meet, and many realize that most available local jobs are low paying. Increasing expenses related to home ownership were emphasized with particular mention of over taxation and the lengthy list of foreclosure notices each week in the local paper. The current layoffs and program cutbacks in the Kalkaska schools were also given as an indicator of this public lack of funds.

Some growth can be seen and several examples of this were given such as the recent increase in businesses in the downtown area, Elmer's occupation in the industrial park, several new housing projects being planned or actually under construction, and a resurgence of sorts with the oil industry. Also suggested was the idea that the community has hit bottom, there is no place to go but up. The new Kal-Tec program was encouraging to some, and many felt a focus on making the town more attractive would get people and businesses of quality to move to the Kalkaska area.

What are the population changes; who lives here?

There was a strong perception that Kalkaska County is experiencing a change in population demographics. Many think Kalkaska is becoming a "bedroom community" to Traverse City. Another observation was a significant growth in the number of retirees coming from Michigan cities. Otherwise, Kalkaska was often characterized as a crossroads that people pass through.

Several respondents felt that there are many new houses here, but the employment is in Traverse City. Smaller retail operations are moving into the downtown; primarily businesses that cater to the bedroom community lifestyle. Many felt that this demographic change would permanently change the complexion of the community.

The increase in the retiree population was not seen as "good" or "bad", but as significant to the direction for growth and services needed in the next several years. Particularly, health care needs, social outlets, and educational/recreational resources were mentioned in connection with this population growth pattern.

Generally good support in the greater Kalkaska community for the Health Center and its expansion of services, particularly those for older citizens was acknowledged by several interviewees. Likewise, many transplanted retirees

who were in the interview population use the Kaliseum facilities and are supportive of its position as a recreational opportunity for county residents.

"The Baby Boomers are coming," said one interviewee. These generally well educated young retirees will also need and expect a good library and a variety of library services. More than one person in the interview process fitting this profile mentioned the library as a "social place"; a place not only for books, resources and reference materials, but also a place to meet others to connect as neighbors.

Is the library an important part of the community?

Absolutely!!!! This was the exact word used by one third of those interviewed!

In fact, *every person in this feasibility study interview process said yes in some way*. Interviewees by a vast majority felt that libraries are an important part of any community, and should be one if not *the* center of this one. The library as a resource for children was the most often mentioned resource, but many of those sharing their own use habits said they used this library for reference, some for casual reading, and some for the internet and computer use. Many also shared stories from their childhood about Mrs. French and a positive introduction to libraries and investigation of printed materials in general.

Several respondents did not currently use the library, but had in the past or have family members who use it. Some use another library, most often Traverse Area District Library, the library at NMC, or church and school libraries. The emphatic support of the need for a library in the community interestingly included these people as well.

Almost all of those interviewed were also pleased with the current programs and services of the library. Many added that the staff did an excellent job *with what they have*; in other words, if the programs were not adequate, it was due to the lack of space and funding. The programs for children and helpfulness of the staff

were two most often mentioned assets. A willingness to get resources from other libraries also was noted. Several people commented that they wanted the library to be open on Mondays and a lack of programs for older children was also mentioned. By and far, the respondents indicated that there is high satisfaction with the library, and *all participants acknowledged that it needs more space.*

What were the opinions of the proposed project?

Interviewees were asked to give their thoughts on the proposed project. The question was in two parts to keep the funding issues separate from the idea itself. The participants were candid and eager to respond; most with strong opinions.

Thoughts on the Island Lake Road location

Nearly one third of those interviewed liked the Island Lake Road location. The serene setting and the possibility of a KART extension appealed to many. Using property that the County already owned seemed logical and opportunity for adequate parking, gardens, natural landscaping and future expansion at this site were also noted. A few endorsed the campus concept although this was rarely addressed even after it was explained.

Concern for safety of children walking to this site, questioning of how much use the library would get if it was "tucked away" and compatibility with the neighboring police department were brought up as potential shortcomings. Not being part of the current sidewalk grid work and no water and sewer at this site were seen as additional drawbacks.

Visibility of a newly expanded library was important to many of those interviewed. Some thought "out of sight, out of mind" would lower potential usage of a new facility. Others expressed concern that building on the Island Lake site would "hide a jewel." A location visible from main roads would give

pride to the community and would be a more constant reminder of this fine resource.

Thoughts on the concept plan and green construction

The size of 15,000 square feet seemed appropriate to the vast majority, with only a few suggesting that the community could get by with less and a couple of people expressing concern that this would be outdated too quickly. In general, interviewees did not have strong opinions about the concept plan or the idea of using green construction techniques. This may partially be due to the short time each person had to consider the drawings. Green construction was considered by almost all of those interviewed to be a good idea, but only a few were adamant that it should be part of the plan and two said it was not at all important. One person wondered why a community room was necessary because he felt the extra rooms at the Kaliseum were underutilized.

Opinions of the cost estimate

Although most of those interviewed agreed that the \$2,500,000 estimate sounded accurate or in some cases even low for a building of this size and design, very few felt that it would be affordable for Kalkaska County. Only one person said this could be raised without qualification. Fifteen others said yes - with the right leadership, using a plan that most people in the community could support, and given enough time. By far, the majority did not have confidence that this could be done at this time with a capital campaign, a millage or a combination. In fact, only one person interviewed indicated a personal donation of more than \$10,000, one more indicated over \$5,000, 11 thought they would give between \$1,000 and \$5,000, and most expected they would contribute less than \$1,000. Seven did not expect to donate money due to lack of resources. Even if the interviewee would consider voting yes on a millage, s/he felt that others would not. If anything, using a capital campaign was seen as more likely