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ROCKPORT PUBLIC LIBRARY CONCEPTUAL DESIGN

The Rockport Public Library, originally founded in 1914 has been in its current location since 1949. It has undergone four modest expansions, the most recent in 1994. Since the last addition, the library has continued to grow, with three times more people using its services and experiencing its friendly and welcoming environment. There are 100 – 150 people using and working in the building each day and the space is not adequate to support the library's collections, technology and programs. Existing spaces are cramped, there is only one bathroom to be shared by the public and staff; and there is minimal staff workspace. If a meeting is held in the front room, it is difficult for patrons to access the collection in there or to find a quiet place to read. Programs are often held in other locations, such as the Rockport Opera House, in order to accommodate library patrons. Parking is limited and handicap accessibility is not ideal. The library has conducted studies to determine the feasibility of expanding on the existing site. There are drainage and site issues that make expansion difficult and costly, with only a limited gain of usable space.

The Library received a grant from the Davis Family Foundation and wanted to explore possibilities for the library's expansion. The Library hired Scott Simons Architects to study the former elementary school site located on West Street owned by the town to determine if a building that would meet the library's increased program needs could fit on the site.

Site Analysis:

SSA studied the site to determine where a new library building and associated parking could be located. The site is adjacent to the Route 1/Route 90 intersection. There are existing curb cuts on West Street where buses dropped off students. The site is also home to athletic fields used by the Town of Rockport. There was a desire to maintain the fields for their current use while also incorporating the adjacent green space into the library siting. There is a slope to the fields and while some spots are wet, there is adequate drainage on the site. The overall site slopes 30 feet from the top closest to Route One to the back of the lot.

There are trees bordering the eastern edge of the site.

In determining the site of the building, the committee discussed how to best take advantage of a southern orientation for solar gain and how to create a connection to the woods for a "mind/body" connection. After multiple iterations, the committee wanted to locate the building closer to West Street for visibility, pedestrian access, and to be able to take advantage of the existing curb cuts to provide a drop-off for patrons at the secondary entrance. The building is sited to take maximum advantage of the southern and western sunlight; there is potential for photovoltaics/solar panels to be incorporated into the project.

Program:

SSA did preliminary programming to determine that the library, which currently is approximately 3,300 SF, needs approximately 13,000 – 14,000 SF to accommodate its collection, technology, and desired staff and program spaces. A children's area approximately three times its existing space, a new teen area, a meeting room large enough to hold more than 100 people and that can be accessed after library hours, better staff work areas, a café, and quiet reading areas are among the desired improvements in a new library.

Concept Design:

The building committee reviewed 9 different schemes for conceptual floor plans for a new library, ultimately narrowing to two schemes that were presented at a community meeting on March 28, 2013. Both schemes incorporated the library's desired program. The preferred conceptual scheme

has two entrances to the library. The primary entrance is located on the side of the building facing the woods. An exterior terrace at the entry provides a place to put benches and potential to create outdoor gathering space. The roof overhang provides shading for exterior and interior spaces. The secondary entrance, which can also be used for deliveries, is located on the West Street side. A double height commons space unites the two entrances; the circulation desk is visible from both entrances and staff can easily welcome all patrons. Upon coming into the entry vestibule, the large meeting room able to accommodate over 100 people is located to the right. There is a separate exterior entrance to the meeting room that can be used when the library is closed, as well as an interior door that separates the meeting room area from the rest of the library. The restrooms for library patrons are located off the hallway to the meeting room, and can also be accessed during after- hours meetings.

Along the wall of windows across from the circulation desk there is a small café, periodicals and public computing. Recognizing that the library is a community resource center, the most active spaces are located close to the entrance and circulation, with the quieter adult reading areas located away from the noisier spaces. The fiction and non-fiction stacks are located along the West Street side of the building with soft seating along north facing windows with clear light. There is an area for special collections, new materials, audio-visuals, and large print materials. Shelving will be 52" high for greater staff visibility and oversight, creating an open and inviting space. Walls can be used for artwork and a community history gallery. Children's services has its own wing with ample room for the collection and program space. Glass doors open out onto an enclosed children's garden play area, creating opportunities to connect with the natural surroundings. There is a child-friendly toilet. The staff at the children's service desk can also oversee teen services, which is separated from the children's area by a small meeting room. Overall the conceptual design for the library envisions a light-filled, welcoming community resource center that serves the Town of Rockport well for generations to come.

Parking:

One of the considerations for the committee was how to situate parking on the site for both the library and the athletic fields. Various options were discussed and sketched. The land across the street from the site is a wetland and not suitable for parking. One option placed parking between the library location and the fields, but it was determined that having the green space adjacent to the library provided opportunities for a children's book walk, play space, outdoor garden, etc. that the committee felt was valuable. Other options explored different ways to configure parking on the site, in front of the library building, in the rear, and on the side. There was a desire to create a drop-off area for library patrons.

After a study of alternatives it was determined that the best location for the parking was on the far side of the site, buffered from the neighbors with plantings. Lighting will be code compliant. Pedestrian pathways to the library and the fields unite the site and provide access to both Rockport assets.

In addition to handicap parking spaces in the larger parking lot, there are two handicap parking spaces along the West Street side near the secondary entrance. A rack for bicycles and book drop will also be located here.

Site Potential:

The committee felt that this location is a "Gateway to Rockport" and would be an appropriate location for a 21st century library that serves all five villages of Rockport. It would also be a location that could support public art that celebrates both the library and the Town's history.