Carthage Public Library District

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PRESS RELEASE

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CARTHAGE LIBRARY APPLIES FOR CONSTRUCTION GRANT

The Carthage Public Library District is in the process of applying for a Public Library Construction Act Grant to construct a new library building. If approved and funded, the library would be built on land currently owned by Prairieland Investment Group LLC at First and Center Streets, just north of the Dollar General store. Apace Design is in the process of designing the building and layout.

The boundaries of the Carthage Public Library District are the same as those of the Carthage Elementary School District, so their service area includes not only Carthage, but Burnside, Ferris, Bentley, Denver, and the surrounding rural areas.

In 2005, Marine Trust donated its former building on the southwest corner of the square to the library. The Library obtained a loan and used savings and public donations to remodel the first floor of the bank, at a cost of $285,000. The Library relocated to 500 Wabash Ave in 2006. A large bequest assisted the library in paying off the loan within five years.

The original plan was to remodel the second floor at a later date. This plan included building a stair tower to provide a required second means of egress from the second floor. In 2012, the Library applied for a Public Library Construction Act Grant to help fund the $587,000 project. Although the application was approved, funding for the grant program was not sufficient to meet the need of the large number of grant applications, and Carthage’s project was not funded. The Library continued to re-submit the application each year, even though no funds were available.

Since 2012, the library’s needs and plans have changed. The Board was informed that the mechanical controls for the current elevator are old and would soon be obsolete; it is very difficult to find replacement parts. One option would be to “modernize” the operating system. In 2016, the estimated cost of modernization was $57,730 to $83,745. This project could not be funded by an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) grant because the size of the elevator car is too small to meet ADA requirements.

This meant that if the library remodeled the second floor, not only would they need to construct a stair tower, but a completely new elevator shaft and elevator would be required.

Beginning in June of 2016, the Library convened a focus group of community members to discuss the issues and various options. In 2017 the committee worked with Dr. Fred Schlipf, a library consultant, to update the Library Building Program that he had originally written in 2000. This type of plan is usually one of the requirements for a grant from the State Library. The library also published an RFQ seeking an architectural firm to serve as a consultant to help evaluate options. The Board chose to work with *apaceDesign Architects + Engineers* from Peoria.

The architect estimated that the cost to construct a new elevator shaft, install a new elevator, build the stairway, and remodel the second floor would be around $1.2 million, not including furnishings.

Both the architect and Dr. Schlipf felt it would be more economically feasible to construct a new one story library building on a new site. Depending upon the cost to acquire and prepare the site, a new 10,000 square foot building would cost around $2.2 million, plus furnishings. A new building designed to be a library would be more functional and easier to supervise than an existing building designed for another purpose. In addition, if the second floor was used by the public on a regular basis, the library would need to staff both floors, which would greatly increase operating costs each year, especially since the minimum wage is increasing to $15 per hour.

The focus group had discussed various sites. There were no available lots on or near the square large enough for a one story library building. Space was available on the beautiful Carthage Veterinary Service campus, which is about the same distance away from the middle school and closer to the elementary and high school as the current location.

In 2018 the Library used the estimates from Apace to revise the construction grant application, changing the project from remodeling the current facility to constructing a new library building. The application was submitted again in March 2019 with a project estimate of $2,459,000, which includes furnishings.

In December of 2019 the Library was informed that there will be funding for the Public Library Construction Act Grant in FY2020. The Library is in the process of preparing all of the supporting documents required by the grant, which must be submitted by March 31, 2020. The firm of *apaceDesign Architects + Engineers* is working on the concept design and floor plan. Based upon the community’s needs, major components will include study rooms, a large space for programs, larger areas for children and for teens, more seating for adults, and a larger work area for staff.

If the application is approved, the Library will have approximately one year to show proof of funding for the local cost share in order to receive grant funding. The Library’s share is about 50% of the project or slightly over $1,200,000. Since the Carthage Library had already submitted an application in 2019, they, along with about nine other libraries, will be eligible for FY2020 funds. According to Carthage Public Library Director, Amy Gee, “This is our best chance at obtaining construction grant funds; however they will only be released to us if we are able to raise our half of the costs. We will be relying upon the community’s support.”

The library board will be researching financing options and planning a capital fundraising campaign, which would begin after being notified that their application is approved.

For more information, contact the Carthage Public Library District, 217-357-3232 or email cartlib@mtcnow.net.