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Fanwood Memorial Library to Apply for NJ Construction Grant

This fall, the Fanwood Memorial Library is moving forward with plans to apply for a matching grant through the NJ Library Construction Bond Act to address the persistent challenges of the current building, which is not ADA compliant, is too small, and has a variety of structural and operational issues. The grant will help the Borough facilitate an extensive redesign on the current site that will be of strong and lasting value, and will also transform the library into a community hub and 'crown jewel' of our much-loved town. If approved, the matching funds from the grant will significantly offset the cost to the Borough and allow for a vibrant new construction project on the same site.

The library has for decades now attempted to balance the demand for world-class library service with the current infrastructure deficiencies. While patrons might not recognize some of the problems the library faces on a daily basis, trying to serve the public has become quite challenging in a building that is approaching 70 years old, and was updated close to 40 years ago. The current facility lacks ADA access and compliance, is often damp and subject to flooding, has a leaky roof, is energy inefficient with no insulation or way to effectively control temperatures, lacks program space and is unable to provide the community with spaces to meet, be tutored, collaborate, conduct business or relax. It is increasingly difficult to serve the community effectively now, and certainly on into the future.

The proposed new building, developed by architect John Veisz, of FVHD Architects and Planners, will make the library ADA compliant and offer a children's department on the main level, both small and large meeting spaces, a large community room, a business center, a teen room, comfortable seating around a fireplace, and a mezzanine for materials and seating, all while supporting current and emerging technology. Whatever your needs, there will be spaces, materials, programs and services for you in this new facility.

Dan Weiss, longtime library director, says that, “although some question whether libraries are still relevant in this digital age, the numbers tell the tale. The count of users through our doors has increased every year, and in 2018 was up again 6% from the previous year. In 2018 over 5,000 books were read or listened to by summer reading club kids, we served up over 10,300 free, high-speed Wi-Fi sessions, and had 140,000+ unique visits to our website. The library provides residents with free
electronic resources like the NY Times, Rosetta Stone, tutor.com, SAT prep, our online streaming services and the Friends’ supported MuseumPass program.”

The Library Board of Trustees is working with a professional fundraising consultant, the Friends of the Library, and the Fanwood Community Foundation to begin planning a capital campaign seeking private, corporate and grant donations to offset the project's cost to the public and supplement some of the project’s needs. The Board has already pledged $50,000 to kick off the fundraising effort from its Library Fund, money that was set aside for a project such as this.

“We’ve been working towards this moment for over 10 years and the time is now,” said Library Board President Ann Minski, “especially given the need and the opportunity of the state grant significantly offsetting the cost of construction to Fanwoodians. We expect there will likely be fierce competition for those funds, but Fanwood’s project seems to be extremely well suited for the grant in terms of eligibility, and how we align with the stated funding priorities. We intend to submit a strong application as soon as it is possible to do so.” The library trustees are optimistic that construction will be completed expeditiously, with provisions made for the library to continue to serve the community while the project is underway.

Residents are encouraged to visit the library where drawings of the proposed space are on display. The drawings have also been posted to www.fanwoodlibrary.org, as well as on the library's social media accounts. More information about the Construction Bond Act is available at: www.njstatelib.org/services_for_libraries/new-jersey-library-construction-bond-act/

The Fanwood Memorial Library has provided world-class library service to residents since 1904, and in its current location for close to 70 years. The library's mission has always been to connect residents to each other and the world, and this new facility will enable it to continue to foster the joy of reading, the spirit of exploration, and the opportunity for personal transformation for all ages, abilities and cultures.