

Timeline on the Discussion of a New Downtown Library

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Library Director
November 7, 2006

September 28, 2004

The City of Baton Rouge/Parish of East Baton Rouge and the Baton Rouge Area Chamber sponsored a trip to Nashville, TN. Attendees visited the new 300,000 square foot downtown Nashville Public Library. During a meeting held at this facility, attendees questioned the Library Director about when the East Baton Rouge Parish Library was going to have a new similar facility and also suggested that this new library in Baton Rouge should be downtown.

October, 2004

Davis Rhorer, Boo Thomas, and John Spain met with Lydia Acosta and Library Board President, John Carnahan. They discussed developing a presentation to the Library Board of Control (LBC) to propose a new downtown main library. A video of an exciting new downtown library in Cerritos, CA was viewed. John Carnahan and Lydia Acosta agreed that a presentation should be made to the Board.

December 16, 2004

At the December LBC meeting held at the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, a presentation by Davis Rhorer, Boo Thomas and John Spain was given and the video was shown. More than 70 persons attended this meeting. Due to the enthusiasm of those in attendance and the information provided by the presenters, the LBC asked the presenters to repeat this presentation in a series of public meetings throughout the parish.

Public Meetings

The LBC scheduled a series of public meetings to gather public opinion on the concept of a new downtown main library. The locations, time, and day of the week of these public meetings were carefully selected to allow as many persons as possible to attend. Meetings were announced via regular media channels, in *The Source* newsletter, on patron overdue notices for the month of January, on the library website, and via flyers at each branch.

January 13, 2005

First public meeting held at Zachary Branch. Twenty persons were in attendance.

January 18, 2005

Second public meeting held at Greenwell Springs Regional Branch. Nineteen persons were in attendance.

January 20, 2005

Third public meeting held at the Goodwood Library. More than 155 persons were in attendance.

January 24, 2005

Fourth public meeting held at Bluebonnet Regional Branch. Eighty-four persons were in attendance.

January 27, 2005

Fifth public meeting held at Scotlandville Branch. Eighteen persons were in attendance.

January 29, 2005

Sixth public meeting held at the Martin Luther King Community Center. Twenty persons were in attendance.

February 1, 2005

Seventh public meeting held at the Central Branch. Twenty-three persons were in attendance.

February 28, 2005

Eighth public meeting held at the Shaw Center-Manship Theatre. More than 200 persons were in attendance.

Throughout the ensuing months, the public interest was raised with many citizens opposing and supporting the idea of a new downtown main library. The LBC did not express a preference for a site at that time. Instead, it told the public that it would reach a decision on a location once the October 15, 2005 Tax Renewal passed and when sufficient funds were saved on a pay-as-you-go basis to go forward with construction.

May 19, 2005

A letter was received by John Carnahan from John Radford, President of the Federation of Greater Baton Rouge Civic Associations in which the following resolution was communicated to the LBC:

“The FGBRCA urges to (sic) the Library Board to announce, prior to the vote for the tax, that the Library Board favors the building of the new Main Library in the vicinity of the existing Goodwood Library facility recognizing the Board is not announcing an exact location at this time but will continue to study the feasibility for the best location for the benefit of all of the people of EBR Parish.”

June 28, 2005

A resolution was received by the LBC from the Board of the Goodwood Property Owner's Association in which the following first paragraph of the resolution stated:

"The Board of the Goodwood Property Owner's Association (GPOA) supports the Library Board's efforts to update and retain library facilities and services within the Goodwood area, and wishes to work with the Library Board to develop an appropriate facility to house the EBR Parish Main Library, currently located on Goodwood Blvd. and within BREC's Independence Park. As both the library and the park are important to the quality of life of our neighborhood, any proposed changes to these two facilities are of paramount importance to our residents. Regarding public facilities adjacent to our residential neighborhood, we wish to be party to process of making this decision and have input into both the decision to change and the design of any proposed changes."

July 7, 2005

The LBC held its regularly scheduled meeting. John Carnahan opened up a public hearing and permitted each person who wished to express an opinion to have three minutes to speak. Twenty-three individuals spoke.

After thanking the public, he presented his position on the location of a new headquarters library. The statement of John Carnahan is as follows:

"Ideally, downtown should belong to everyone. In the recent past Baton Rouge's downtown declined as our city, like many others, succumbed to urban sprawl. Its revitalization, once thought of as hopeless, now has an exciting momentum. Downtown has again become a gathering place in which all parish citizens can have proud ownership. It has become our cultural center as well as our political center and is once more attracting business.

I am convinced after seven months of consideration that returning the main library to the downtown area would ultimately be beneficial. The library would benefit from the synergy of being a major contributor among the educational/cultural offerings in Baton Rouge's living room. Main would also be seen as belonging to everyone in the parish.

Where certain institutions are located has a profound effect on community life. Every community needs "common ground" that belongs to all the members of the community. Historically, a downtown is this kind of place. Ideally, it is in downtown that a community lives out its identity as a whole-where people are not only part of regional neighborhoods but also citizens of the city. Returning the main library downtown would be a symbol of the library belonging to all people of East Baton Rouge Parish.

We as citizens have a responsibility to shape the life of Baton Rouge and a vital downtown is essential to our community life. To again locate the library downtown would be a bold

declaration that East Baton Rouge Parish has a dynamic center which is attractive to business, political, educational and cultural institutions.”

Mr. Carnahan then made a motion as follows:

“I move that upon the successful passage of the library’s tax renewal, the Board will provide the necessary funds to create a state-of-the art regional library at 7711 Goodwood Boulevard either by comprehensively remodeling the current facility or by constructing a replacement facility in the immediate vicinity; the ultimate approach will be based on economic and logistical considerations. The Board favors a downtown location for a new headquarters library and will commit to secure the necessary funding to construct a new headquarters library in the downtown area, the specific site for which will be determined after receiving input from a firm with professional expertise in site selection.”

Ms. Stepteau stated that she felt that the main library should be relocated downtown from the beginning. Mrs. Auer said that she has changed her mind since the discussions began. She now feels the main library should be located downtown which belongs to everyone. Mr. Reed said he likes the idea of locating the main library downtown because everyone can access it. However, he felt that the Board should not state where the headquarters library will be built at this time.

Ms. Stepteau seconded Mr. Carnahan’s motion, Mrs. Auer voted for the motion, and Mr. Reed abstained from voting on the motion. The motion carried. Mrs. Georgia Brown was absent from the meeting due to illness.

September 15, 2005

Ninth public meeting held at the Goodwood Library. The public was invited to provide input on design features of a new or renovated facility at the Goodwood location. These ideas were collected by architects Steve Jackson and Benjamin Bradford of Cockfield-Jackson Architects, who were contracted by the LBC to perform a schematic design study and cost opinion for the project.

October 15, 2005

The tax renewal passed by 62% in spite of all of the controversy of the location discussion. The previous tax renewal in July 1995 passed by 56%.

October 28, 2005

Tenth public meeting held to receive the results of the schematic design and cost opinion study of the Goodwood facility. Many of the features of the renovated facility were echoed in the public input received in September.

June 16, 2006

The LBC contracted with Brace Godfrey, Jr. and John Schneider of Cyntreniks LLC to conduct “An Assessment of the 10-year Capital

Construction Program”. In accordance with the Board’s July 7, 2005 vote favoring a downtown location, the specific focus areas of this study were to include sites in the downtown area, financial, and funding options. Cyntreniks LLC was selected in large part because of its intimate knowledge of the downtown area.

October 19, 2006

Cyntreniks LLC reported their findings at the meeting of the LBC held at the BREC Independence Park Theatre Auditorium. A public hearing was held to permit the public to ask questions about the study. Attendees received copies of all slides presented by the consultants. The report was also published on the Library website, www.ebr.lib.la.us.

November 7, 2006

Eleventh public meeting is being held on November 7, at the Catholic Life Center, 1800 S. Acadian Thruway, from 7:00-9:00 p.m. so that the public may direct their comments and questions related to the Library’s 10-year capital improvements plan including possible locations, building features, and other concerns.