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The Purchase of the Northport Pub & Grill Building

Where We Are and How We Got Here

There has been considerable discussion surrounding the Leelanau Township Library's proposed purchase of the Northport Pub & Grill (NPG) building, and with that discussion have come some misconceptions and misunderstandings about the process.

We recognize that this is an important undertaking for our community and that residents understandably have questions about how we arrived at this point. We would like to take this opportunity to address some of those questions, clarify the process, and provide additional background on the Library Board's decisions.

Q: Did the Library Board consider other properties besides NPG?

A: Yes. Following an extensive strategic planning process and facilities study, which included a community survey with more than 300 respondents, multiple public workshops, and opportunities for community input, the need for a new or expanded library facility became clear.

With this information in hand, the newly elected Library Board of Trustees began exploring a variety of possibilities throughout the community. These included expanding

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into the township offices within the existing library building, purchasing property outside the village's downtown area, and investigating other potential locations.

The Board also approached the owner of the former Pier Group property adjacent to Haserot Park to inquire about its availability.

Throughout this process, the Board remained focused on finding a location that would meet the community's long-term needs while keeping the Library accessible and centrally located.

Q: What about the former Pier Group property?

A: The former Pier Group property was identified early in the process as a potentially excellent location for a new library, particularly given its waterfront setting and beautiful views.

A Library Board member who personally knew the property owner made numerous inquiries throughout 2024 about the possibility of purchasing the property for a new library. Unfortunately, the owner consistently indicated that the property was not available for sale.

The Board's interest was persistent enough that, eventually, we were politely asked not to pursue the matter further. Nevertheless, shortly before entering into the option agreement for the NPG building, the Board made one final inquiry. The answer remained unchanged.

While the Pier Group property was certainly an attractive possibility, it was ultimately not an available option for the Library.

Q: Why wasn't the community informed of the plans earlier?

A: When the Library Board first learned of the possibility of purchasing a portion of the NPG building, our initial inquiries were met with considerable interest from the owners. As discussions progressed, the possibility of purchasing the entire building emerged, presenting an even more promising opportunity.

However, the property owners requested that negotiations remain confidential, and the Board agreed to honor that request as part of the discussions and subsequent option agreement.

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The Board conducted its deliberations within the applicable provisions of Michigan's Open Meetings Act, including those governing closed sessions related to the purchase or lease of real property.

We understand the community's desire to be informed about such a significant undertaking. At the same time, respecting the property owners' request for confidentiality was an important part of maintaining the opportunity to pursue the purchase.

Q: Why was the NPG building selected?

A: The NPG building offers a unique opportunity to meet the Library's long-term needs while remaining in the heart of Northport.

Before entering into an option agreement to purchase the property, the Board conducted a thorough evaluation of the building's existing conditions and worked with architects and construction professionals to develop preliminary renovation plans and cost estimates.

The building was found to offer the space and flexibility necessary to meet the needs identified in the facilities study, including dedicated areas for children and teens, expanded collections and services, and much-needed meeting and gathering spaces for the community.

Its location is another significant advantage. The property is within the village's business district and close to the school, both of which were identified as desirable characteristics through the strategic planning process and community feedback.

Equally important, adapting an existing building offers the opportunity to create a modern library without the need to acquire vacant land and construct an entirely new facility.

Taken together, these factors made the NPG building a particularly compelling opportunity for the Library and the community it serves.

Q: How will the purchase and renovation be funded?

A: From the beginning, the Library Board recognized that acquiring and renovating the NPG building would require a significant financial investment.

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The Board determined that the most appropriate approach would be to pursue funding through a comprehensive capital campaign, supplemented by grants from foundations and other potential funding sources.

This approach is intended to fund the purchase and renovation through private contributions and grant support rather than relying on an additional property tax millage.

The Board is committed to responsible financial planning and to keeping the community informed as the fundraising effort and project planning move forward.

Q: What will happen to the bowling alley?

A: The Library Board recognizes that the bowling alley has been a valued part of the Northport community, and we would have welcomed the opportunity to preserve it if doing so had been practical.

However, after carefully considering the ongoing maintenance expenses, staffing requirements, operational responsibilities, and challenges associated with noise control in a library setting, the Board determined that retaining the bowling alley would not be financially or operationally feasible.

While the bowling alley has its own place in the community's history, using public library millage dollars to maintain and operate a recreational facility would not be an appropriate or sustainable use of the Library's resources.

The Board's responsibility is to ensure that the new facility fulfills its primary purpose: providing excellent library services and creating a welcoming, accessible space for learning, gathering, and community engagement for generations to come.

Q: Won’t a larger library cost more to operate and maintain?

A: A larger building will have different operating costs, but square footage alone doesn’t determine what a facility costs to maintain. The age, condition, efficiency, and functionality of a building are also important considerations.

Our current library was built in 1968. As the building continues to age, we expect increasing costs associated with maintaining and replacing heating, cooling, electrical, plumbing, and other building systems. The facility also lacks public restrooms and has significant accessibility limitations. Based on the Library Board’s previous investigations into renovation options and costs, the building’s physical constraints would likely make full accessibility impossible, regardless of the amount invested. This strikes at the heart of the Library’s mission to ensure that everyone in our community has equitable access

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to library resources and services. Staying in the current building would mean continuing to invest in an aging facility while likely never fully resolving these accessibility barriers or its fundamental space limitations.

The proposed new library offers opportunities for greater efficiency. Although the NPG building is larger, it is also more modern, and renovations will provide opportunities to incorporate energy-efficient heating and cooling, lighting, and other improvements to reduce long-term operating expenses.

The new facility also offers opportunities to offset operating costs through partnerships and potential revenue from the commercial kitchen and community meeting spaces. The Library Board is committed to keeping library resources free and accessible to the public, while exploring reasonable fees for private, for-profit businesses that reserve these facilities for commercial use. This approach would preserve free public access while allowing businesses that benefit from these spaces to contribute toward their operating costs.

The Library Board is actively evaluating projected expenses and identifying ways to minimize them through energy efficiency, maintenance planning, responsible staffing, and community partnerships. Importantly, current financial projections indicate that the Library's existing, voter-approved millage will be sufficient to cover any net increase in operating expenses, without requiring an additional millage or increased taxes to support library operations.

Looking Ahead

The Library Board understands that a project of this magnitude naturally generates questions, discussion, and differing opinions. We welcome that interest and recognize the importance of keeping our community informed.

Every step of this process has been guided by a commitment to the long-term future of the Leelanau Township Library and the people it serves. Our goal is not simply to find a larger building, but to create a library that will meet the evolving needs of Northport and Leelanau Township for decades to come.

We appreciate the community's continued interest, patience, and support as we work toward that goal.

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