

Finance and Properties Committee Meeting

Minutes

December 1, 1983

Present were Shirley Moore, Marshall Susler, David Marshall, Chair, and Sharon Alpi, ex officio. Also present was Robert Dumas, City Librarian.

Mr. Marshall called the meeting to order at 4:10 p.m. in the Board Room.

Mr. Marshall raised as the first item of business the maintenance contract for the computer with Rolling Prairie Library System. RPLS had forwarded a contract which furnished the basis of discussion.

Mrs. Moore had previously noted that the contract provided for RPLS to abrogate but there was no provision for other parties to leave during the five year term of the contract.

Mr. Susler objected to a five year term feeling that such an extended contract was unnecessarily long.

Mr. Marshall suggested that the restriction on port reduction during the term of the contract was undesirable inasmuch as developments may render obsolete the anticipation for port need.

After much discussion of these points, it was agreed that the term of the contract should be reduced to one year, that an additional article should be incorporated providing for Decatur Public Library to terminate the agreement on 30 days written notice in the event that DPL makes other arrangements for computer processing, and that the clause in article 5 prohibiting port reduction during the term of the agreement be deleted.

Mr. Marshall then asked Mr. Dumas to outline the capital needs of the Library as he perceived them.

Mr. Dumas asserted that these needs fall under three headings: the remodeling needs of the Central Library, Branch service, and bookmobile parking needs.

Mr. Dumas remarked that the Central Library was designed to serve the needs of Decatur for 25 - 30 years, but practically considered there was every reason to believe-based on general experience of library needs and the specific experience in Decatur which began to experience growing pains in the middle thirties, had a small area expansion in the fifties but did not achieve a new central library until the seventies - that the building would have to do for perhaps fifty years. Consequently, we have been observing a very conservative approach with respect to the collections. The one area, however, that is outside these efforts is the audio-visual collection and

services which were reinstated when we moved into this building. It was planned at that time that these collections would eventually create a space problem. The availability of the unassigned area for future expansion provided a solution to this problem and it was planned that eventual public service would expand to the present Technical Services area and that that function would move to a remodeled unassigned area.

While the entire audio-visual collection is growing, the most rapid expansion with respect to space need is and will continue to be in regard to the phonodisc collection which is growing at a rate of about 1200 albums a year. The storage bins for these albums each have 20 compartments capable of holding 35 - 40 albums so that a double bin range has a capacity of not more than 1600 albums. There is sufficient space currently to last probably until next summer at which time another range will be added. This can be accommodated by elimination of furniture or less preferably by elimination of YA shelving. A year and a half later it will be necessary to add another range of record bins. If no other provisions have been made, this will have to be at the expense of Young Adult shelving.

A case might be made for the elimination of Young Adult Services on the basis of circulation alone. It does not furnish a high percentage of our service. But in terms of the goal of the Library, it has importance inasmuch as it is the adolescent years in which the Library loses much patronage. Once lost only a small portion of these patrons return as adult patrons.

With respect to Branch Service, Mr. Dumas admitted his inability to prove such a need. If Chicago had no branches it would be impossible even there to assert the need other than by pointing to the branch experience of New York City. There is no answer, in the last analysis, to the person who insists that there is a central library available to anyone who really needs to use the library. There are 13,000 people living north of Pershing Road and more than 8,000 in South Shores. If either of the communities were independent communities, no one would argue that they were too small to support their own libraries. This argument should not be made because the communities are not independent. And by providing branch service where there is a population base to support it, the bookmobiles would be freed from trying to serve as substitute branches and could then be used to bring library service to marginal neighborhoods that cannot support branch service. It was Mr. Dumas' fear that on the one hand growth in Central Library use would be used as an excuse for ignoring branch need, using the argument that central resources have not been fully exploited; and, on the other hand, when central use began declining that the decline would be used to justify not building - a Catch 22 for library service.

The third need is for proper parking for the Library's bookmobiles. We are currently begging parking space from shopping centers. This has

created problems from time to time because of the parking area being congested at the time that bookmobiles need to be parked or moved. Beyond the Library is at hazard. The parking lots in shopping centers are intended for the businesses located in them. If the bookmobiles are perceived to be a problem, shopping centers can without notice cancel parking privileges and the bookmobiles have no place to go.

Mr. Marshall noted that in addition to the three areas of concern Mr. Dumas had discussed there was a fourth he had remarked, to wit, the need for financial provision to acquire a computer in the event that such should be likely.

There was a general discussion of the various matters mentioned. In connection with the needs of the Central Library, Mr. Marshall mentioned the possibility of remodelling the auditorium for A/V services and creating a combination auditorium/Board Room out of the present Board Room and unassigned area. He also suggested that the growth of the audio-visual collections might be accomplished by building higher bins with the compartments not at two heights, as the current bins have but with storage compartments three or four high, perhaps with short ladders to permit patrons access to them. Mrs. Moore felt that this would be undesirable from a safety standpoint. Mr. Dumas felt that such a solution would tend to depress use. Mr. Marshall suggested the possibility of rotary files that would allow the various compartment levels to be brought to a height convenient for each patron but which would allow more compacted use of the A/V area's volume. Mr. Dumas was skeptical that the floors would bear such weight or that files capable of bearing the weight of the records could be found. Mr. Susler said his firm had such files and felt that they would sustain the load but mentioned their noisiness is a drawback. Mrs. Alpi expressed opposition to development of third floor storage space and felt accessibility was a prime problem and that provision should also be made for parking.

In connection with the general discussion, it was noted that our capital needs related to problems that could be designated short term, intermediate term and long term. Mr. Susler felt that the computer was one facing the library in the short term, that a branch building program was in the longer term and that the space needs of the Central Library fell in between the two and would be confronting the library in perhaps four years.

The bookmobile parking problem was discussed briefly and it was agreed that something needed to be done. It was suggested that the parking for bookmobiles could be solved in conjunction with acquiring space for a branch.

Mr. Susler suggested that a branch program in the long term should be preceded in the near future by a testing of the need and he proposed that the Library rent suitable quarters in order to test over a period of several

years whether a location could support branch service. Mr. Dumas pointed out that the former A & P Store in South Shores was currently vacant and that if half of it could be refurbished and rented it might provide a suitable test. Several of the Committee agreed and felt that overtures to City Council should be made as quickly as possible since Mr. Dumas reported a considerable lead time would be necessary for staff to develop collections, make provisions for furnishings, etc.

Finally with respect to remodeling or expansion of the Central Library it was agreed that the Committee would recommend that no grant be applied for at this time and that the Board be requested to authorize engaging a consultant to survey the Library's building problems and present possible solutions.

Robert H. Dumas