

Mendon Board votes to moves library

BY SHAWN KREST

The new Mendon Library has a new home as the town board voted to abandon the Monroe Street site in favor of Village Square. If all goes well, the board hopes to present the plan for public approval this summer.

Since the Monroe Street site won board approval in May 2003, the project has been plagued with setbacks. Drainage problems with the land and architectural rework have delayed the project, originally scheduled to be completed in February of this year. After receiving a report from the architect earlier this year, the board looked into alternate sites, employing the MRB engineering firm to prepare preliminary cost estimates.

MRB's analysis showed that the Village Square site would cost \$167,000 less to develop than the Monroe site. Because Village Square already has water service and most utilities, MRB estimated that it would cost a total of \$384,223 to develop. Monroe Street would cost \$551,562.

Board member Paul Tichenor challenged the estimate, pointing out that Village Square's ground has bedrock very close to the surface. "One project (in the area) had to do serious blasting," he said. Mr. Tichenor said that any blasting work would quickly eat up the cost savings that MRB promised. "Can you guarantee me that this won't go over by more than \$167,000?" he asked MRB representatives.

While MRB couldn't guarantee the costs, they argued that the site is "pad ready," meaning most utilities and roads are already in place. "The parking area won't require excavation," MRB representatives said. "Neither will storm water, since there's already a pond installed." The only excavation MRB could foresee was to extend water and sewer lines by about 60 feet.

Board members Roy Cluff and Marvin Vahue voted in favor of the Village Square site, as did Town Supervisor Moe Bickweat. Voting against the change were board members Tichenor and Pat Freeman. "I do not like the location of the site," said Ms. Freeman in defense of her vote. "I think we're going to suffer with it," added Mr. Tichenor.

After approving the site, Mr. Cluff called for a public referendum as soon as possible. "We've been discussing this for six, seven, maybe eight years," he said. "We should go forward, get it out to votes and let them decide instead of us deciding these issues every other week."

Supervisor Bickweat outlined the steps that needed to be completed before the town could go forward with a vote. The library committee needs to meet with the architect to finalize the building's footprint at the new site, which will then need approval of the Village Planning Board. Final cost estimates will also need to be provided by the architect and

engineers.

"Once those three things are completed," said Mr. Bickweat, "we could say to this board that we want a mandatory referendum. Would they like to move forward and establish a bond issue to fund this project?"

"I urge you to work as quickly as possible," said Mr. Cluff. "Settle this issue once and for all. If they reject it, they reject it. It's time."

"We've gone this long," argued Mr. Tichenor. "What's the difference if we have it in July or November?"

Mr. Cluff pointed out that there are three major issues that will be coming before the community in future months—the library, the comprehensive plan, and sewers for the hamlet. "We need to keep them separate and distinct, not run them all together and have people get confused on the issues."

Ms. Freeman took issue with Mr. Cluff's comment that the library issue has "divided the community long enough."

"I don't think this exciting opportunity has torn our community at all," she said. "It's raised public awareness. People should be excited and talking about this."

Town Board Notes: The board also received a report from town board attorney Sheldon Boyce on the status of several lawsuits involving the town.

The lawsuit by residents near the proposed Mendon Green subdivision has been dropped. A 3-2 vote in favor of

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