

Santa Cruz City Council

Agenda - May 14, 2019

Item 28:

Motion carried to put on hold the decision to proceed with a Downtown Library Project and to convene a Council subcommittee composed of Councilmembers Cummings, Meyers, and Brown to investigate alternatives, in collaboration with Library staff and the interested community, and return with a recommendation before or no later than October 2019, considering alternatives presented in the fall of 2018, with one of the alternatives to be a renovation of the Downtown Library, and that the work of the committee align with that of the Health in All Policies work.

Background:

Measure S—a bond measure to fund in improvements throughout the county-wide Santa Cruz Public Libraries system—was passed in June 2016. Based on a thorough needs assessment process for all branches, funds were allocated to each participating jurisdiction, which was given responsibility for managing the improvements or new construction, in consultation with professional library staff. In some cases, bond funding was not adequate to complete the envisioned projects, and the jurisdictions have identified additional funding. The City of Santa Cruz initiated planning for the three branches within its jurisdiction: Branciforte, Garfield and Downtown. The Branciforte and Garfield improvements were relatively straightforward, and plans are proceeding for those two branches. Because of the condition and complexity of the Downtown Branch, a community committee was established to explore the desired functions, operational needs and construction costs of several options for the Downtown Library. Last fall the Council approved the project concept recommended by this committee: a mixed-use project incorporating the library, commercial uses, parking, and possible housing. However, while there was support for the project concept, there was also opposition. Since that time, and following the last election, the project has not moved forward.

Discussion:

Measure S contains very specific timelines for the use of bond to carry out the projects identified in the ballot measure. The City was allocated a substantial, but limited, amount of money for the improvement of the Library's Downtown Branch. Because the available funding was limited, Library staff and the community committee explored alternative funding mechanisms bearing in mind the desire for a modern and excellent facility. The result of this effort was a recommendation for a library project combined with a parking garage on the site of a surface parking lot and the Farmers Market. The rationale for this project was based on the perceived inadequacy of Measure S funding for the Library project, the projected future demand for replacement and additional parking in the Downtown, and a proposal to relocate the Farmers Market to a permanent and improved location. There is significant confusion in the community about the specifics of the proposal as well as the possible existence of viable alternatives and opportunities. Based on this, in our view, there is a need for the Council to take a fresh look at

options for the Downtown Branch project before proceeding with further work. In order to do this in a timely manner, we think the Council should convene a Council subcommittee and task it with investigating alternatives for the Downtown Branch project. As part of this effort, this subcommittee would work collaboratively with Library staff and concerned stakeholders with the expectation that it would return to the full Council with its recommendations no later than the October, 2019. The subcommittee as proposed, includes membership of the Council who are committed to approaching this important project with a full and complete investigation. We are recommending that Councilmembers Cummings, Meyers, and Brown be appointed to the subcommittee. Finally, this recommendation has been discussed with the Library Director and she is in agreement with this approach.

Action by City Council

City Council moved to unanimously approve the Motion with two amendments: Council members Krohn and Glover requested that the subcommittee convene meeting in public. Vice Mayor Cummings and council member Meyers wanted the subcommittee to review their process and bring it back to the council at a later date — this impasse left the subcommittee process intake as proposed. Council member Krohn and Glover wanted to ensure that the subcommittee would also consider remodeling the current library as part of the subcommittee's work plan.

Vice Mayor Cummings moved to approve the Motions, Council member Brown second and all members voted to approve the recommendation to set up a subcommittee.

Additional Information:

<https://www.santacruzsentinel.com/2019/05/12/santa-cruz-may-reassess-downtown-library-project/>

Chamber's Position:

The Chamber supports the implementation of the conceptual Downtown Branch Project proposal, which entails the construction of a new Downtown Library, combined with a parking garage at Lot 4, creating a new Downtown Branch as well as additional parking and mixed use land opportunities in the form of affordable housing, retail or office space. This project would include a completely renovated Downtown Library, but also additional downtown parking for employees, retail and restaurant customers and tourists. The Chamber sees great utility for the community in the implementation of the conceptual proposal, whereby a modern Downtown Branch would include a mixed use project with affordable housing, retail shops and parking, providing further infrastructure investment in Santa Cruz.