

Brownsville Library seeking community feedback on proposed expansion

By Joyce Koballa jkoballa@heraldstandard.com | Posted: Tuesday, April 8, 2014 2:00 am

The Brownsville Free Public Library board of directors wants feedback from the community for a proposed bricks-and-mortar expansion to the 87-year-old structure.

Librarian Kristina Haluska said residents have until May 1 to complete a survey on ways to improve the library's existing resources along with what it is lacking.

"The library won't thrive if the community isn't behind it," said Haluska.

Surveys are available at the library at 100 Seneca St. during regular hours from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

According to Barbara Carroll, board president, the library serves residents in Brownsville Borough, Brownsville Township, West Brownsville, Newell and Luzerne, Jefferson and Franklin townships.

Carroll said the library is essential to the community, serving as an extension of where children can go when the school library is closed as well as being a valuable resource for seniors. "We see a lot of different ages and traffic," said Carroll.

According to Haluska, the library's immediate needs include bringing it into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act by having to relocate restrooms from the basement and children's area to the first floor.

The project would also provide for meeting space with after-hours access for organizations and more parking.

"We hope to maintain the character and look of what we have now, but expand it size-wise," said Carroll.

Haluska said she has received about 40 surveys so far, with a consensus of the need for more space, a larger children's area and leisure reading while the library is also hoping to add to its three public computers.

Last year, the library board hired Pfaffmann & Associates architectural firm based in Pittsburgh to conduct a feasibility study of the project that includes expanding the current facility on a vacant lot adjacent to the library.

The lot is owned by the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority, which agreed to transfer the property to the library once the bank behind it is stabilized to halt erosion along Dunlap Creek and invasive species are removed.

“That was key to this whole project,” said Carroll.

As part of the requirements, Carroll said the library has three years to complete the work.

The revamping will be funded in part with \$20,000 the library received from an individual trust fund managed by PNC Bank and \$8,000 secured through the Community Foundation of Fayette County.

The architect will meet with the board later this month to present several options and a projected cost for the expansion.

Carroll said the board has received direction from the community foundation on possible funding avenues.

According to Haluska, the library currently has 2,000 cardholders. Despite adverse winter weather, Haluska said, 700 people walked through the doors in January and 1,000 in February.

“We’re getting people come in who haven’t been in here in years, a lot of adults and grandparents with their grandchildren,” Haluska said.