

**The Public Library of Youngstown & Mahoning County  
Pre-Submittal Conference for the Facility Master Plan  
Tuesday, June 4, 2024  
10:00 a.m.**

**Aimee Fifarek:** It's just in the process of turning 10:00 o'clock, so I have gone ahead and started the recording. We will do our best to capture the questions that are asked and make sure those responses are made available to everybody who is interested in the proposal.

Thank you everyone for coming to the preproposal conference this morning. My name is Aimee Fifarek, I am the Director and CEO of The Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County. I would like to introduce the rest of the team who will be doing their best to answer your questions today.

**Mark Mrofchak:** Mark Mrofchak, I am the Chief Financial Officer here at the Library.

**Debby McCullough:** Debby McCullough, Chief Operating Officer.

**Dave Foster:** Hi, I'm Dave Foster, I take care of the maintenance of all the buildings.

**Aimee Fifarek:** So, happy to have everyone who is here presently introduce themselves and let us know the firms that you are from. We will start with Zoom.

**Richmond Kinney:** Hi, my name is Richmond Kinney, and I am with Library Strategies. We are based out of St. Paul, Minnesota. We're part of the Friends of St. Paul Public Library.

**Aimee Fifarek:** Excellent, thank you very much. Go ahead.

**Scott Weaver:** Scott Weaver with CBLH Design based out of Cleveland.

**Aimee Fifarek:** Excellent, welcome.

**Scott Weaver:** Thank you.

**Aaron Hill:** Aaron Hill with Bialosky, out of Cleveland.

**Ben Crabtree:** Ben Crabtree, also with Bialosky.

**Michael Ruscitti:** Representing BSHM Architects in Youngstown.

**John Orsini:** I am John Orsini, with BSHM Architects in Youngstown.

**Aimee Fifarek:** Thank you all for being here. I'm not sure if we will see people coming in during this two-hour period, but I always like to honor the prompt. So, fire away! You have our proposal, and we did our best to ... we haven't had an actual Master Plan done since 2002, so we really aren't sure what the market looks like these days or what to expect in terms of pricing or useful proposals. We drafted a narrative rather than doing a specific RFQ. We are really looking for, as we said in the proposal, your standard assessment of all our existing facilities as well as some demographic outlooks.

We are fully aware that normally Master Plans are done when systems are growing. This area has been shrinking in population, but there are many potential things on the horizon and lots of other organizations within the community looking to do analysis and repopulation efforts through the Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber and Eastgate Regional Council of Governments. So, we don't really know what those portend for us, and where it leads us to invest taxpayer dollars. We are hoping to get some professional opinions on one or hopefully both of those elements.

**Aaron Hill:** *Regarding that demographic and economic trend data, is that information the library already has that you will be providing to us to analyze or is that up to the team to go and mine and find all that data?*

**Aimee Fifarek:** That is up to the team. We have a certain set of data that's specific to usually card holders and delivering library services to those card holders. But, as far as economic growth and development, less in that area. We do know that Eastgate and the Chamber have been working on a large-scale assessment of future developments, specifically I believe for housing. But, beyond what's publicly available, we have not dug into it, but we are trying to have those conversations.

**Aaron Hill:** *OK. Community engagement, have you done any aspect of that related to leading up to the Master Plan? If not, is there an expected amount of that that is going to take place that you would expect the team to lead through the master planning process?*

**Aimee Fifarek:** No, not that it's specifically related to the master planning. We did a process last year where we did some engagement across our staff and mostly patron base, as well as an online survey that went into our Strategic Plan that we launched in February. But as far as community engagement, Debby, did you want to say anything about that?

**Debby McCullough:** Sure, when Himmel and Wilson did the study in 2002, they did everything. They had community meetings at every location at every branch, they had several. So, they engaged the public: What would you like the library to look like in the future? How do you use the library? Do you come to this building to use, you know, all those kinds of questions. So, they did sort of like town hall meetings with the communities. They also did all the demographic studies and then they analyzed all the buildings in other ways as far as the age, what needed to be done to those buildings, if they needed replaced.

One of their actual suggestions was to the Board and library staff how we move forward with the buildings that exist and from that we moved on to see that Main Library needed renovation. We were the last of the whole scheme of that. Canfield got a new library. They looked at the different neighborhoods, what kind of services we were providing, that sort of thing.

**Aaron Hill:** *So, these town halls that took place at each of the branches, is that something you would be expecting again as part of this level of community engagement?*

**Aimee Fifarek:** I think we would like to see a substantial amount of community engagement. Whether that's at every branch in communities outside of the libraries, because we are notorious in finding it difficult to get feedback from the community who don't actively use our buildings. So, we're not going to specify exactly what that looks like. We do want community engagement.

I will say that as Debby referenced, the renovation of this building, when we started that process in 2019, we did a couple of town hall sessions at Main Library, and we probably had 30 people in each session. It was not extremely well attended. So, if there are ways to get more community members into those discussions, I think the better.

**Aaron Hill:** *In the staff engagement that you've done just recently, do you feel like that is sufficient going into the Master Plan or is there more of that that you would expect as well?*

**Debby McCullough:** I think they did staff engagement as well; they did them separately from the community meetings. We had staff meetings and community meetings. One of the things I know that we've been talking about for two years now, is the fact that there are areas in the southern part of the county that aren't being served. So, we don't know where we may need another library. I mean, we have Sebring, down in the farther end of the county, but we're trying to see if there are pockets in the community that we aren't

serving. We're pretty good in the inner city and in the suburbs, but not farther out. Of course it's sparsely populated. We always look at the kinds of things like where are the heavy traffic areas, where are people going? These places are remote, but we want to serve them because there is a lot of poverty in southern Mahoning County that we're trying to address through library service. So, those are the kinds of things that we're hoping to get out of this.

**Aimee Fifarek:** And just to be clear, because I can't remember if we put it into the document, there seems to be an unprecedented level of state funding floating around these days, and we have had two opportunities that we could not wait for the Master Plan for. One was a grant funding through the Appalachian \$80 million dollar fund, that is done, and I forget the acronym of the organization. It wasn't the large Appalachian fund it was the more specific one. The state organization that's usually responsible for overseeing the building of schools. That is more of a formal grant process which we applied for, specifically for the Struthers Library, because we do have redesign work that was done in 2022. So, we should be hearing whether we were successful in that application process I think June 21<sup>st</sup>. And then, because there is legislative money out there, through the senate we applied, we sent in a proposal to the house, we were not successful, but we do have an existing proposal in front of the senate and that would be specifically for the Sebring Library. That is obviously then a straight up grant.

**Scott Weaver:** *As far as the engagement goes, there is obviously a bunch of different tools we could use. I'm assuming you're open to different strategies whether it be on the ground, digital or other means like that?*

**Aimee Fifarek:** Absolutely.

**Aaron Hill:** *Regarding what Debby just mentioned about the potential for expansion of a new branch location in a southern area of the county, something we've worked with a consultant on previous Master Plans is having an actual real estate broker as a part of the team when we're looking at potential options as part of the Master Plan that they are realistic of city owned or available parcels of land. Is that something you would like us to carry on our team? I ask these questions for the sake of putting together a comprehensive proposal of what it is you are looking for. Or is that something we should hold off on, like having that aspect of the team, of a real estate broker that would be able to provide that information to us?*

**Aimee Fifarek:** Mark? Did you want to speak to that? I mean, I will say that I mentioned the predesign work we had done for the Struthers Library project. That started with someone who was an existing CFO [in an architecture firm] who was working on her initial certification and did that sort of analysis about the best businesses to co-locate

with the library on a particular plot of land, so I would find that valuable. I would say also to make sure that would involve considerations for land abatement, or any other non-for-profit variance. Mark, I don't know if you had any other comments on that topic.

**Mark Mrofchak:** You summed it up well.

**Aaron Hill:** *As a part of, once we've done all the analysis on each branch's needs and we're looking at the options for renovation, expansion, relocation, a new branch, are you expecting conceptual levels, site planning, space planning to be done for each one of your branches as part of the Master Plan?*

**Debby McCullough:** I don't think we got into that detail. We got suggestions: this location needs a new building, you should close this location, you could build on this site but tear it down ... that's kind of what they did the last time ... this is due for replacement, remodeling, etc.

**Aimee Fifarek:** And of course, analysis of major systems, projected cost to replace ... the question will always be, what is the most cost-effective approach. While it is never fun to close a library building, because people are emotionally attached to it, at some point if the building is no longer structurally, or from a systems perspective viable, or it's not cost-effective to renovate, it's not a good use of taxpayer funds.

**Aaron Hill:** *I think you just touched on another question I had which was, we're assuming that you're expecting a cost estimate to be put to each of the recommendations, a renovation or expansion that we're working with a third-party cost estimator and putting together the full expectant cost of the execution of the Master Plan.*

**Mark Mrofchak:** We're open to the use of the plan for budgetary purposes, so that, ideally, would be what we would want.

**Aaron Hill:** Got it.

**Debby McCullough:** And I think it's in the proposal, we're looking at a ten-year shot of what we should be doing in the next ten years.

**Richmond Kinney:** *I have a question about, you just referenced the last time you did a facilities assessment. Is that the 2022 report that you mentioned earlier?*

**Debby McCullough:** No, 2002. So, it's twenty-two years old now. Youngstown State's Center for Urban Studies did a demographic study once for us so we could track where people were moving in the city and the county and do all of that. That was not as in depth as the Himmel and Wilson study because that one, they did the community and staff conversations. It was really the first study of all our buildings, which were mostly built in the 60s at that point that we were replacing branches now. A couple of them, for example, Struthers was built in 1957, Sebring 1965, Brownlee Woods 1968, so those are our three oldest buildings. They are not in horrible shape, as far as the actual envelope of the building, but they're not ADA compliant, they are older buildings with systems that are having to be replaced, furnaces, air conditioning, that kind of stuff. They are small, it's hard to get around in them. Library services, as you all know, have changed drastically through the years. People want meeting rooms, they want gathering spaces, they just don't want books. Those are the older buildings.

We also have our Campbell facility, which is located near the school and it's part of a partnership with the school system with other people in different spaces. There is a health center there, Akron Children's Hospital, our Library, there's gymnasiums, meeting rooms, there's STEM education, there's a middle school, there's athletic fields, all kinds of stuff. So, that's also a possibility for the future is finding us a place to partner close with somebody, not having a stand-alone building, too. There are all kinds of things that our libraries are trying.

**Aimee Fifarek:** To be clear, that facility is our one public building that is a leased space. The school district owns that building. We have a long-term lease on that.

**Debby McCullough:** Fifty years.

**Aaron Hill:** I have a couple of administrative questions. ***Do you have a timeline in which you expect the Master Plan process to be completed? Or when you need it completed by?***

**Aimee Fifarek:** I don't think we have anything specific on the books. I think part of the proposal, if you do submit something, would be an estimated timeline for the completion of the Master Plan. We are going to be on the ballot this fall. We go for a renewal of our levy every five years. So, I was hoping we would start this process earlier, but because of a variety of things, that didn't happen. I don't think we want to put a timeframe on it. We want it done well and right.

**Aaron Hill:** OK. My second administrative question. ***The RFQ states we can submit for section one and two combined, or section one only, or section two only. Can we submit for section one and two combined as well as just as architects, section one?***

**Mark Mrofchak:** The envelopes for the proposals need to be specifically marked as to what section of the RFQ you are proposing on.

**Aaron Hill:** That was my follow up. *Is there something we just are making a statement over? These are actually two separate proposals that are submitted. So, there is a duplication of, for instance section one information is in both. But one of the two can be in section one and two.*

**Aimee Fifarek:** I think we considered this option. So, I would say to be on the safe side, especially if there is any differentiation of the stand-alone proposal versus the combined proposal, it would probably be best to do two separate envelopes. We try to adhere to code as strictly as possible, timelines and delivery and all those things.

**Mark Mrofchak:** Each of the proposals that come in has to be specifically marked for what you are proposing. I think you were asking, if you did the work for section one can you use that same work to propose just for section one when you are doing it for the combined? Is that what you mean?

**Aaron Hill:** Yeah, because it would be the same information.

**Mark Mrofchak:** I would say yes then.

**Aaron Hill:** This is just from the standpoint of we're hoping for flexibility on this. We're going to propose a combined but if the Library had a different idea of our strategic planning, demographic analysis partner, we are saying we are open to that and therefore find that the, looking to an arranged marriage.

**Aimee Fifarek:** Excellent! Well, I appreciate the statement of flexibility. Without seeing any of the proposals and knowing what's going to come in, the Library is looking to minimize administrative overhead. So, if we can have one firm who is willing to, whether that's contract out a part or do it all inhouse, ideally, we have one point person and one group to work with. That's the preference, but we left it flexible because we weren't sure what the interest would be. So, I think that is a marvelous strategy.

**Michael Ruscitti:** So, we write it on two separate envelopes if we are ...

**Aimee Fifarek:** Mm hmm.

**Michael Ruscitti:** OK.

**Aimee Fifarek:** That way there is no question.

**Scott Weaver:** *If you could clarify, is it one hard copy or how many hard copies, digital?*

**Mark Mrofchak:** The ad says three hard copies and one electronic.

**Aaron Hill:** *Is that electronic copy something that you want emailed to you or is that on a jump drive?*

**Mark Mrofchak:** You can do either, but usually we get them on a jump drive.

**Richmond Kinney:** I don't really have a question, but sort of an offer. Library Strategies, we really focus on the community engagement parts of things. So, we are going to submit for section two. It's an in-depth community needs assessment focusing on the economic development part. We don't have any engineers or architects that we work with, so I'm just putting that out there if anyone is forming a team and wants some library focused consultants.

**Aimee Fifarek:** Thank you very much. As I said, we will be doing a transcription of the recording and making that available so that anyone who wasn't able to attend the pre-proposal conference can view the questions and answers. So, you will also be able to have a record of who all else was here and might be a potential partner.

**John Orsini:** *There was a mention of other or affiliate partners in the Youngstown area for this. Would that involve anything regarding some of the community needs? Would the library assist in who those are?*

**Aimee Fifarek:** Certainly, and I think part of what I think we ask for in the demographic piece was we have, over I would say the last decade or so, really focused on partnerships as a force multiplier. So, we are working with a wide variety of organizations beyond our walls, but we may have organizations that we haven't targeted or have missed. So, if there are those recommendations, we would love to see those. We can certainly provide existing partnerships that we use and it's one of those things that we all know through practice but we haven't fully documented and spent on the priority list so this would be a good reason.

We also know that while public libraries are usually famous for providing early literacy education and children's services, the surgeon general's report related to social isolation and issues around our aging population, which is certainly true in Mahoning County, is something that we need to take account of, and we are seeing increasing requests for



senior services in community centers and areas that have none. Often, they look to the library for that.

We've made ourselves available for a good long time to account for questions and we are happy to answer any you might have, but if you don't have any questions, that is perfectly fine as well.

**Michael Ruscitti:** Thank you for having us.

**Aimee Fifarek:** Absolutely! Thank you all for your willingness to consider our project.

**Michael Ruscitti:** Thank you. ***Just by chance, is that 2002 study available, for review?***

**Aimee Fifarek:** Pardon?

**Michael Ruscitti:** ***Is that 2002 study available for review at all?***

**Debby McCullough:** We only have it in hard copy.

**Aimee Fifarek:** It's two immense volumes, so we're not opposed to making it available, it's just, it would be a lot of photocopying.

**Michael Ruscitti:** ***Would we be able to come see it?***

**Aimee Fifarek:** Yes, definitely. And actually, Debby was talking and asking whether she should bring it up or not. I'm like, well, but then we'd have to make it available to anybody who wasn't here and that means we have to have digital copies.

**Debby McCullough:** But you know what, we can also have Matt digitize this.

**Aimee Fifarek:** Mm hmm, yes.

**Debby McCullough:** We have a digital services librarian now. He's been digitizing a lot of the library history and some of the special documents. It's a big project for us.

**Aimee Fifarek:** Yes, absolutely.

**Aaron Hill:** ***If we have any more questions, do we direct them to you, Mark?***

**Mark Mrofchak:** Sure.

**Aaron Hill:** Thank you.

**Aimee Fifarek:** Thank you very much and I'm glad you had the opportunity to come to the Library and see our latest renovation.

**Aaron Hill:** Congratulations! It turned out great. Fantastic.

**Richmond Kinney:** Thank you all, I'm going to sign off. I appreciate the time and answers.

**Aimee Fifarek:** Thank you very much. Have a wonderful day.

**Richmond Kinney:** Thank you!

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