

# Orleans Officials Want New Library, Community Center To Coexist

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How do plans for a new Snow Library intersect with those for a new community center in town? Members of the library board of trustees and the community center feasibility task force are trying to find out. RYAN BRAY PHOTO

ORLEANS - What might a new Snow Library look like, and how does the town plan for a new community center around it?

Recognizing the potential for an overlap in programming between the two buildings, the town's community center feasibility task force recently met with library officials to see how both projects might coexist.

The task force is working through the results of an online survey that sought information as to what residents and visitors might want to see in a new community center. Meanwhile, the Snow Library Board of Trustees made their case for planning for a new library to the select board in March.

The select board voted March 23 to allocate \$150,000 for a feasibility study to look at options for a new library as part of the town's capital improvement spending for fiscal 2024. An additional \$1 million for design costs and \$20 million for construction are in the capital improvement pipeline in the years ahead.

The existing library dates back to 1952 and was last renovated in 2001. Steven Gass, who chairs the library board of trustees, told the task force May 26 that tentative plans for a new library include multiple meeting and study rooms, a

conference room, a small cafe, a large auditorium, a small kitchenette and a multipurpose activities room for events such as computer and cooking classes, demonstrations and crafts. The new library also would have more dedicated space for the library's collections and staff office space.

Gass said the trustees prepared a building plan for a new library in 2019. But some features, such as the kitchenette, cafe and auditorium, could also work as part of a community center, task force members noted.

"What you're planning...and how that might correspond with what we do in a community center is really of interest to us," said Fritz Luft, who chairs the task force.

"Is there room for taking a second look at [the building plan] and adjusting it? I think certainly there is that possibility," Gass said.

Andrea Reed of the task force, who also chairs the select board, made the distinction between "intellectual" and "active" recreation, and suggested that active programming might be a better fit for a community center.

An auditorium, she said, could work as part of a new library and allow more space for other types of programming in a new community center.

"We look at the library as one of the pivotal cultural centers," she said. "So for certain types of activities, it feels right in terms of Orleans history that if you're going to go to a cultural presentation, you're going to do that at the library."

Gass said trustees envision an auditorium that could seat 200 people. That's double what the current library can accommodate in the Crane meeting room.

The trustees hope to build a new library in the same location as the existing one on Main Street. With the library's proximity to Nauset Regional Middle School, task force member Tracy Murphy of the task force said an auditorium could be an ideal fit.

The task force also discussed to what degree council on aging programming should be incorporated into plans for the community center. The existing senior center on Rock Harbor Road has been plagued by flooding issues, but Reed said more discussion and "public process" is needed to determine the council's needs, and how a new center might accommodate them.

The trustees also want to focus on creating more space for youth programs, which Gass said is "inadequate" in the existing library. He said separate rooms for children's and young adult programming have been discussed. There could also be added space for tutoring, added Library Director Tavi Prugno.

"Kids like to be alone together," Gass said. "The fact that they can look around and see their peers engaged in the same activity creates an important feeling of community."

Bonnie Campbell-Runyon, the task force's representative from the cultural district committee, advocated for a space with sinks for art classes, which she said might be more suitable for a community center.

"We need a messy, art space," she said.

Runyon also noted that there are also plans to renovate the old firehouse on Main Street into a multipurpose facility. The community preservation committee denied allocating \$1 million in preservation funds toward the project this spring, but the town's community building renovation task force is continuing its work to find a way to bring the project to fruition.

Gass said ideally, trustees and the task force would find a way to fold the needs of a library and community center into one building. But that could prove easier said than done.

"Practically speaking, it's really hard to imagine that," he said.

In a survey conducted by the trustees to figure out what people want to see out of a new library, most respondents stated a preference for the library to be built in the same location. The site is conveniently located downtown, and the library sits on land that is owned by the trustees, Gass said. But building a larger library on the site could be tricky, he said.

Meanwhile, Gass said pursuing state grants for the new library's design and construction could prove difficult. The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners hasn't initiated a call for new grant applications since 2017, preferring instead to award money to projects that have already completed the application process. As a result, there is a wait list for library projects seeking to apply for grants, he said.

"That's been frustrating to us on the board," he said. "As the issues with the building don't get any better, we thought regardless of what the state does, we had to move forward with correcting our situation."

The task force and trustees plan to continue discussions about how programming might be shared between the future buildings.

"We're going to huddle on this side and see what we want to do with this information, but it narrows down what we need to accomplish and what our space may be," Luft said.