

Thank you to the Mayor, Council and Citizens for allowing us the time to bring an update regarding the library board's progress. I would also like to thank David and Avnika from *McMillan Pazdan and Smith Architecture* and Nate Rall, Director of Planning and Construction with Georgia Public Library Service for being here.

Congratulations to our mayor elect and newly elected/re-elected council members.

On a sad note we would like to offer our condolences to the family and loved ones of Bill Jones. Bill was a highly respected part of our community and he will be dearly missed.

As discussed at the June, 2021 council meeting the library board has procured a property appraisal and a feasibility report in reference to the *O'Kelly Memorial Library*. We have provided copies of these reports to the mayor, council and city manager. Fellow Library Trustee, Dana Russell, will present this report in just a few moments detailing the structural needs of our city library. Before Dana addresses the report I would like to quickly share with all of you why the board believes, as told by citizens and personally witnessed, why we as a city need a larger updated library:

- Homeschool families need a free place to gather, share resources, learn and socialize.
- Families need a place to spend their summers without having to pay entrance fees to an expensive animal or theme park.
- People of all ages need a green space to enjoy programs, events, and for relaxation.
- Entrepreneurs need a place where a staff member can help him or her complete an application for a business license.
- Families, in whatever form they may come, who have been placed in a difficult situation beyond their control, need a place where they can access free wifi and borrow movies, books, laptops, tablets, hotspots, and so much more because they do not have the current financial means to pay for these vital resources.
- Our seniors need a place where they feel welcome to meet and connect with friends without having to buy an expensive meal at a restaurant in order to do so.
- Teens need a safe place where they can gather for study groups and Dual Enrollment studies because the school media centers do not have room to accommodate them and are not open in the evenings, weekends or Summer.
- A place to honor the past with a proper genealogy room that can be used to not only house and protect historical publications but also accommodate local and visiting researchers.
- There is also a large number of our 14,000 plus citizens who still prefer to hold a bound book in their hands. Circulation statistics show this has remained a consistent need.

To address the whispers I have personally heard in this room "if so many people want a new library then where are they?" Those people are living right here in our community.

- They have family responsibilities or work that may keep them from attending a late night or early morning meeting.
- They are visually impaired residents who cannot drive at night or those who don't own a vehicle at all.

- Residents are challenged in many ways but their absence at a meeting does not mean they don't want or support a new library for our community.
- Our door counts and circulation statistics show how important *O'Kelly Memorial Library* is and has always been to our citizens.

A better question to ask is “who are the people in our city that would most benefit from a new, updated, safer and larger facility in downtown Loganville?” The answer is simple – we all do.

- These people are your friends, your family, and your neighbors.
- They are parents or guardians with children in search of educational and engaging programming and resources outside of the classroom.
- They are young people looking for a safe space to read or gather with friends.
- They are adults using public computers to search for employment, start a new business, or complete forms and applications.
- They are seniors needing assistive technologies, homebound book delivery, or large print materials.
- They are patrons looking to trace their family history or conduct genealogy research.
- They are the people living paycheck to paycheck or who live on a fixed income and need the library for computer access because they can't afford internet at home.
- They are regular citizens looking to save money by checking out books, movies, laptops, eBooks and Audio Books for free instead of buying these materials.
- Some patrons come regularly to the library to read the *Walton Tribune*, which is also freely available.

When one member of our community benefits from the library, the entire community reaps those rewards.

O'Kelly Memorial Library patrons are a varied group and utilize the library at different times during the day, for very different reasons.

- Seniors may visit the library in the morning while running errands before it gets too busy to safely enter and exit the library or because they are unable to drive safely at night.
- Homeschool groups visit the library for field trips to get books and attend story times and programs.
- Tutors and their pupils visit the library after school and in the evenings to make use of the study room and library resources to support their extended learning.
- Job seekers utilize the public computers during the day to fill out applications or work on a resume. They may also take online courses about starting a small business for free.

At all hours of the day one can sit in the library parking lot and see a wide range of people with very different needs come and go throughout business hours. Some of these patrons are on foot or riding a bike. Just because these patrons are not “seen” or are not “vocal” about their needs and wants does not mean that the library is not vitally important to their lives. Compelling evidence of this need was demonstrated when COVID necessitated the shuttering of library doors across the State of Georgia. Our staff worked tirelessly to reimagine library service and meet the needs of the Loganville community with curbside service, selector service, computer

appointments, the PLAY student card (which gives every child in Walton County a public library card), and a technology lending program that provided computers and hotspots to those without internet access or a device at home. Demand for access and resources was all the more critical during that time.

Libraries are ever evolving and not obsolete. There's a reason the United States alone has more than 17,000 libraries, with 417 of those located in Georgia. In fact, Georgia proudly boasts a library in every single county in our state. How lucky are we that Walton County has four amazing libraries serving its almost 100,000 residents? Modern and updated libraries are necessary for a city who desires to serve her citizens.

This is coming personally from me but I need to tell all of you what I witnessed in just a 10 minute span at *O'Kelly Memorial Library* last week. **I saw and heard a mom and young child enter the library and ask to use a computer because their device was broken. Her daughter needed to turn in a school assignment. ** I saw an elementary aged student being tutored in the children's section. The young man was often distracted by what was going on around him because someone was already using the lone study room and they did not have another private room to use for tutoring. Also, his mother had to hang out in the children's section because she did not have a separate adult section to go to. ** I heard a mother of three at the circulation desk talk about how happy she was that her children did not have to worry about losing a library card because through the *Play Student Card* initiative her children use their lunch ID to check out books. **Just tonight, before I came to *City Hall*, I witnessed all but one of the computers at *O'Kelly* being utilized.

I ask all of you to PLEASE visit the *O'Kelly Memorial Library*. I invite you all to spend some time in our city library and see for yourselves just how important it is to our wonderful residents. Thank you all for your time.