

## MELROSE PUBLIC LIBRARY - Renovation plans move forward

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In a presentation Monday night, Tappé Architects, Inc. Principal Jeffrey Hoover presented renovation designs he said would allow the Melrose Public Library to move forward "into the 21st century."

"It is a library that has served the community well for decades but there are the decades to come, and the library needs to be ready for those as well," Hoover said. "That is why we were called on to study what we can do."

Hoover said after consulting with MPL staff, Tappé Architects – which also oversaw construction of the new Melrose Veterans Memorial Middle School and Melrose High School learning commons – determined the current library is limited in terms of handicap accessibility, flexibility and space.

Tappé's design proposes completely replacing the library's 1963 addition, thereby increasing the building's footprint to allow space for book collections, expanded work and meeting areas, a function room that sits 120 people, an "innovation lab," a seed library and more efficiently placed administrative desks and offices.

The historic section of the library would be restored to create reading rooms.

"The historic piece is really restored, lovely reading rooms that become their own destination place within the community as a place to go and enjoy a quality of architecture and a quality of space and a quality of library experience that is hard to achieve [in a new building]," Hoover said.

### Respecting history

Hoover said the current designs are deferential to the original library, which was completed in 1904 with funds contributed by philanthropist Andrew Carnegie.

The entrance will be situated between the old library and the proposed addition, a decision Hoover said is intended to highlight the brick facade of the original structure. The new addition will be set back slightly from the 1904 building and will likely feature a terracotta material on the exterior that mimics the original structure's sandy color.

"It is going to make a compatible match while still being distinctively of this century, as opposed to being a traditionalist response," Hoover said of the proposed addition. "It doesn't copy the existing architecture, but it makes good reference to it and respects it."

### Financing

Hoover estimated the renovation would cost about \$20 million, but said a more detailed cost estimate will be included in a grant application to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners this January.

Mayor Rob Dolan cited the MBLC grant as a primary motive for moving on the renovation now, as the organization could pay between 40 and 45 percent of the renovation cost if the MPL project is selected.

"There are very few programs outside the school building assistance program that provide real money," Dolan said. "They don't give any money to build police and fire stations, DPW yards. They offer money, thank God, for libraries. If you leave 40 cents on the table, that would be a generational sin."

Hoover said his firm has been working with the MBLC throughout the design process, and was confident the organization would approve the MPL grant. The larger question, he said, is when MBLC funding will come through.

"We may not be funded right away because there are 34 libraries applying for grant funding and that will add up to many times more than what the Legislature currently has to expend," Hoover said. "It will be a process of funding these library projects over the next five, maybe six years. We don't know where we fall."

**Dolan said the library renovation is part of his administration's larger plan to rebuild municipal infrastructure in the city over the next decade.**

In addition to the library renovation, city officials and residents are working on plans to renovate Memorial Hall and build a public safety

facility to house Melrose police and fire departments, Dolan said.

Completing those projects concurrently while interest rates are low and the city's bond rating is high will require Melrosians to vote in favor of a debt exclusion, he said.

"We are going to be having a very serious discussion in this community over the next year regarding police and fire, library and Memorial Hall," Dolan said. "That discussion will probably end with proposals for all three and a debt exclusion before the citizens of Melrose to pay for this project – the same thing this community did in 2003 to pay for the Veterans Memorial Middle School."

Dolan told the Free Press the city will likely propose the debt exclusion within the next five years.

"It is in our interest to move forward quickly," Dolan said. "Nothing is cheaper than it is today. The question ultimately is whether this generation of Melrose wants to invest in these buildings and solve these problems."

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