

Rehoboth Task Force Continues to get Info on New Library

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Rehoboth Beach Public Library officials and a task force created to help the transition to a two-library operation held a third meeting June 21.

Article by Chris Flood

The task force created to guide Rehoboth Beach library officials through the process of creating two locations met again June 21, and while no decisions were made on services offered at each, members continued to glean more information on the proposed project.

Library officials announced months ago they are pursuing a two-library operation – a downsized downtown location and a new, larger facility off Warrington Road, across from the new Beebe Healthcare Specialty Surgical Hospital.

After meeting twice before, there was an expectation the task force would begin discussing the services to be offered at each location, but there wasn't much talk on that topic at the latest meeting. During a presentation, library consultant Patricia Anderson of Lewes-based Horizon Philanthropic Services showed a preliminary breakdown of suggested services, but no one commented.

As shown, Anderson said both locations will have collections, computers, copier and fax, open gathering space, study rooms, tax preparation, programming for all ages and booking ordering shelves. The downtown location would feature small meeting rooms, art space with sink, small storage space and upgraded audio-visual. The Warrington Road location would feature meeting

rooms of various sizes, a large meeting room with a catering kitchen, large storage spaces, state-of-the-art audio-visual, telehealth and outside space.

Instead of a discussion on services, task force members heard from Sussex County Librarian Rachel Lynch about how the county-led and independent library system was created, Rehoboth Beach Public Library Program Librarian Lauren McCauley on how things are currently running at the library and library board Vice President Kay Wheatley with basic background information on how to move forward.

The current library in Rehoboth is 12,000 square feet. Wheatley said the Warrington Road location will be 18,000 to 25,000 square feet. The goal is to keep it one level, she said.

A portion of the funding from the state is based on the size of the population it serves, which is why Wheatley said they've already begun discussions with Lewes Public Library officials about how the two libraries will split their service areas. A portion of the six-mile radius for the new Rehoboth location overlaps the six-mile radius of the Lewes library, but the two groups are determined to not have the new library affect the existing library, she said.

Some of the funding for the project comes from the American Rescue Plan Act, which comes with a stipulation that the new library needs to be open by the end of 2026.

Given the hard opening date and tight construction timeline, a task force member asked Wheatley why the library board couldn't begin to design the new building now.

Wheatley said they could, but they were taking time to get as much community input now as possible. Once plans are put in place, the library doesn't want to pay an architect to redo plans three or four times, she said.

Another task force member asked if there is a way to better control the people who hang out in the library, but aren't using any of the services.

Wheatley said part of a library's role is to be open to all members of the public, even the ones who are taking shelter and not bothering anyone else. Compared to other locations, Rehoboth doesn't have much of a problem with the homeless, she said.

There was a discussion about charging members of national media more when President Joe Biden is in town. As of now, when media set up in the meeting room or on the second-floor outdoor patio, they pay the same rates as everyone else – for the meeting room, it's \$15 per hour during the weekdays and \$30 per hour during the weekends; for the outdoor patio, it's \$100 per day.

There was a that's-an-awfully-low murmur among task force members, but Wheatley brought the discussion back to the new library, and she said fees are something that can be discussed in the future.

As of now, there's one more task force meeting scheduled for 6 p.m., Wednesday, July 12.

However, if needed, there might be one more meeting scheduled Wednesday, July 26.