

# Architect's initial plans would increase usable footage at Watchung Library

Posted: Wednesday, May 13, 2015 4:00 pm

**WATCHUNG** – An architect developing renovation plans for the Watchung Library wants to build an elevator, restrooms and stairwell in a bump-out outside the main building to increase its usable square footage, Council President William Nehls reported at the Thursday, May 7, Borough Council meeting.

Nehls' report focused on the architectural phase of renovations to the aging Watchung Library, whose current structure is out of date with modern library needs. The Borough Council last July had approved spending \$1.5 million for this renovation with an additional \$500,00 to be raised by donations.

In response to a question from Councilwoman Dianna Beck-Clemens on a timeline for the renovation's schematic, Nehls said that he pressed the architect, Anthony Iovino of Arcari & Iovino Architects, to "get something to us by the end of summer. He hesitated to agree to that timeline. I'm hoping we have something together so we can go out to bid by the end of the year."

Iovino's firm specializes in the building and renovation of libraries.

Nehls said the Public Works Committee has had two meetings with Iovino, one of these including Somerset County Library personnel.

"These discussions have proven to be very productive in that Mr. Iovino has been able to provide the committee with several ideas," including moving the elevator, restrooms and stairwell outside of the building, as an add-on, Nehls said. "This would allow access and use of all three floors and basement and would bring the borough into compliance with current regulations." Nehls added that "it is also Mr. Iovino's intention to upgrade this building with improvements including sprinklers throughout the building."

Placing these three areas outside of the building frees up a great deal of space that can be used for library purposes, Nehls said. "In addition, being able to use the third floor for office spaces frees up even more space for library use," Nehls said, adding that during the last meeting, "Mr. Iovino's calculations showed that we would have approximately 10,000 square feet of usable space once these renovations have been completed."

He said that Somerset County Library personnel said that the county uses a factor of 1.25 square feet per resident for their libraries. "With a population of 5,801 residents, this equates to approximately 7,251 square feet," Nehls explained. "The borough will be able to provide an additional 2,749 square feet for library use with this renovation."

“During this year’s budget process it was determined that an ordinance established in 2001 set aside money for an elevator in the library. This money is still available and will be used for this purpose, which will free up funds for renovations,” Nehls said. The elevator is projected to cost from \$200,000 to \$250,000.

The first step in the library renovation process was the hiring of a structural engineer to study whether the current building, which is about 70 years old, is structurally able to support a modern library use. Earlier in the year, Lortech Engineering had reported that the building was, indeed, capable of supporting a library.

“This brings us up to date on the planning process,” Nehls said, adding, “I think we’ve made great moves and we look forward to seeing what he (Iovino) has to say.”

“He certainly is the right guy,” said Mayor Stephen Pote. “He has the experience and flexibility.”

“It was his idea to put the elevator, stairwell and rest rooms outside the building envelope,” Nehls said.

Councilwoman Debra Joren commented that Iovino was also excited about using a detached building on the library site as additional space, either for storage or as a conference room. Nehls said the building could probably hold 40 to 50 people. The building would be attached via breezeway to the main library building.