Columbia Library District
Minutes, Meeting of August 23, 2007

Board members present were Tom Richards, President; Susan Breyfogle; Rosie Gerding; Marie Glaze; Lynn Hostetler; and David Webber. Jim Loveless, David McDonald, and MaryEllen Sievert were absent.

Also present were Melissa Carr, Director; Elinor Barrett, Kris Farris, Russell Niermeyer, and Lauren Williams, DBRL staff; Nestor Bottino, Bottino Grund Architects; and Brian Harrington and Wes Bolton, Allstate Consultants.

Call to Order

Richards called the meeting to order at 11:37 a.m. in the Virginia Young Room of the Columbia Public Library.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Work Session with Traffic Engineer and Architect on Parking Lot Traffic

Barrett said that over the past several weeks the board, staff, and traffic engineers from Allstate Consultants had generated a number of ideas for improving parking lot safety, and this meeting was to report on the previous day’s work session with the traffic engineers and architect Nestor Bottino and get the board’s feedback and direction for how they would like to proceed.

Harrington said determining the exact causes of traffic problems in the library’s lot was a challenge, but he felt the two major issues were Grant School traffic and the vehicle/pedestrian congestion at the foot of the stairs and main entrance to the south parking lot. He said Barrett would report later on the success of having Grant School parents use the north lot, and he would focus on the pedestrian and driver conflicts in the south lot. Harrington reported that since last presenting some initial ideas to the board, his team has taken a more in-depth look at the situation and determined the most pressing issues to address are: a) the short term parking spots, which have the most frequent turnover and because of their location force drivers to back out into the busiest area of the lot and often back traffic up onto Garth; and b) enhancing the visibility and use of the ramp so that pedestrians exit the library and enter the lot farther away from the driveway entrance.

Harrington presented three schemes for discussion. The first focused on shifting the handicapped spaces farther east toward the stairs and moving the ten-minute parking spaces to the west end of the ramp area. An option to increase the number of handicapped parking spaces is included for study in this scheme. The second scheme showed a landscaped fenced barrier across the parking aisle closest to the entrance (aisle one) with a pedestrian opening and a marked crosswalk leading to the stairs. Harrington pointed out that this scenario requires eliminating at least two parking spaces and creates a “dead end” area of the lot with no second way out. The third scheme again included a barrier but reconfigured that section of the lot to create a way out of aisle one, requiring the elimination of five parking spaces. Harrington said
this scheme makes the middle of the lot the primary parking area and highlights the ramp entrance.

Bottino then presented ideas for enhancing the ramp and shifting the focus away from the stairs. He said moving the short-term parking to the west end of the ramp or to parking aisle three should increase its use. He also suggested placing a set of poles with banners at the end of the ramp and at parking aisle three, creating a visual line that points to the ramp’s entrance. He discussed emphasizing the ramp wall with color complementary to the building materials or with graphic elements. He also suggested some sort of screen between the loading area and ramp entrance to better define the space. In response to a suggestion, Bottino said that using color or graphics on the side of the ramp wall that patrons see when leaving the building might encourage them to use the ramp as they leave.

Board members discussed whether or not creating a dead end area of the lot would solve one problem while creating a new one and expressed concern that patrons would not accept this new configuration. Barrett reported on a recent conversation with a patron who expressed her frustration with the inconvenience of a dead end parking aisle, and her perception that it would be difficult to turn her car around in the aisle when it is blocked off. Several members said that they would be willing to lose a parking space in order to widen the lot’s south exit ramp and make it easier to use. The board discussed how to further encourage use of the 104 spaces in the north lot, and Bottino suggested that repeating graphics or banners that appear in the south lot would readily identify the north lot as a library parking area. Bottino suggested another option would be to narrow aisle one to mirror the aisle on the west side of the lot, and Hostetler said this might help eliminate the sort of wide-open “no man’s land” in front of the stairs. Bottino pointed out that the ideas discussed fall into a range of options with building barriers in an attempt to control movement at one end and more subtle and psychological changes at the other.

The board discussed ways to emphasize the bottom of the ramp, including a canopy and the creation of a plaza area that might encourage dropping off and picking up children there instead of at the stairs. The board discussed whether slanting some of the parking spaces to create one-way traffic in the aisles would alleviate some of the congestion or if people would ignore the one-way lanes. Harrington said that slanting the spaces would require eliminating some parking spots, and Bottino recommended against slanting the spaces in some aisles and leaving them straight in other areas as this would cause confusion.

Barrett summarized the board’s discussion and listed the solutions for which she heard the most support:

1. Relocate the ten-minute parking spaces to the end of the ramp.
2. Shift handicapped parking spaces east toward the stairs.
3. Highlight the ramp and include some sort of plaza or waiting area at the west ramp entrance.
4. Modify the south exit ramp drive, widening the opening so that it is easier to use that route as an exit from the lot.
5. Highlight parking aisle three to create some sort of visual energy that marks it as a path to the ramp and the main entrance to the building.
Barrett said that inviting Grant School parents to use the north lot appears to have had a positive impact on the peak after-school use of the south lot. She asked if this success in combination with the list of solutions proposed would accomplish enough to leave aisle one alone. Harrington said that he could not give a definitive answer but he did think these steps would be a reasonable phase-one approach. He said taking these steps would not do anything to prevent moving on to a phase two if they didn’t accomplish enough with these changes. In response to a question, Harrington clarified that he was recommending striping from sidewalk to sidewalk across the lot entrance at the main drive to warn drivers to expect pedestrians at these points. This striping was added to the list as solution number six.

The board discussed the construction costs of modifying parking aisle one and the future possibility of extending the landscaping to narrow that aisle so that cars have to come farther into the lot before turning left. Board members discussed whether or not the current list of solutions really addresses the traffic problems caused by cars picking up or dropping off people at the steps. Richards suggested that including benches and a defined waiting area in the plaza at the west end of the ramp would help, and Barrett suggested a temporary sign reading, “Pick-up/Drop off Area Ahead,” might be needed.

Richards asked that item number seven on the list of solutions be a campaign to reeducate patrons about the 104 spaces in the north lot coupled with an effort to emphasize them somehow, perhaps with banners as suggested earlier in the meeting. Barrett reported that encouraging the Grant School parents to use the north lot was a great success this first week of school, with a PedNet representative stationed in the lot distributing brochures to promote using the north lot as a way “to keep our kids safe.” She added that the Grant School principal has spoken very positively about the progress on this issue. Farris noted that the additional seconds the city added to the traffic signal time allowed to cross Broadway was also helping.

Barrett said she needed the board’s approval to have Bottino Grund and Allstate study the proposed list of solutions and develop designs, outline pricing, determine their impact in terms of loss of parking spaces and on operations as they are implemented, and develop a schedule for completing the work. Barrett clarified that this process would involve paying professional fees to Allstate and Bottino Grund.

Hostetler moved, Webber seconded, to direct staff, the architect, and the engineers to develop plans for implementation of the seven lot improvements as outlined during board discussion. Barrett informed the board that both Allstate Consultants and Bottino Grund had donated their time on this project to-date. The motion passed.

Barrett said that Williams would email the board to determine a meeting time in September to review the consultants’ progress on this issue.

**Public Comment**

There was no public comment.
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Miscellaneous

There were no miscellaneous items to discuss.

Adjournment

Glaze moved to adjourn and Richards adjourned the meeting at 12:55 p.m.

Minutes recorded by Lauren Williams, Executive Assistant.

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Board Secretary