

City to consider Facebook's offer to build a new community center and library in Belle Haven

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On December 16, 2019, Facebook submitted its proposed framework for exploring the funding and development of a new multi-generational community center and library at the current Onetta Harris Community Center, Menlo Park Senior Center and Belle Haven Youth Center, near Kelly Park. City staff is now developing the potential project timeline, milestones and recommendations for the City Council to consider and act on as early as next month.

On October 2, 2019, Facebook announced its intention to collaborate with the City and local community to build a new center that would incorporate library services, recreation facilities and enrichment programs to serve our local youth, seniors, fitness enthusiasts and families. The investment is one of the largest ever proposed in the neighborhood. Facebook reiterated that it remains committed to the community and helping achieve this long-desired wish of the neighborhood.

Longtime Menlo Park resident and outspoken voice in the Belle Haven neighborhood, Rose Bickerstaff said, "We are thankful for Facebook's decision to generously gift Menlo Park's Belle Haven community a new campus. It is a decision that truly pays it forward. The positive impact of this new combined senior center, community center and library will be felt not only by our bayside neighborhood, but also Menlo Park residents in general. Facebook has always been a great neighbor and we thank the City of Menlo Park for this partnership with Facebook and the community."

"I believe this proposed new community center has the potential to rebuild relationships in the community, build trust in our city government and make a difference in improving the quality of life for our residents. This is a much awaited opportunity to upgrade and expand services for our library users, youth, seniors and families," said Mayor Cecilia Taylor, who also serves as the elected City Council member from District 1, which includes the Belle Haven neighborhood.

On October 15, 2019, the City Council considered and accepted the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, which identified a new Belle Haven multi-generational facility as the number one priority of that plan. In addition, in anticipation of Facebook's formal offer, the City placed the stand-alone project for a new Belle Haven Branch Library on temporary hold and authorized the City Manager and City Attorney to begin working with Facebook regarding its proposal.

In the two months since the October meeting, Facebook's team worked swiftly and thoroughly to gather relevant plans, documents and information needed to formulate the [written proposal for the new multi-generational center and library](#) that was submitted to the City this week. During this time, City staff responded to Facebook's questions and requests for background data from the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, Belle Haven Branch Library study and other documents, as well as existing site plans and facility layouts.

Now, City staff is working diligently and expeditiously to identify next steps for the City Council's consideration. Over the next 4–6 weeks, staff will develop a proposed response to Facebook's generous offer and recommend to the City Council plans for community engagement, identifying the type of environmental review required, temporary/interim services to support current facility and program users during construction, budget amendments for related costs not included in the offer, and plans for how to meet the rigorous proposed schedule. The City Council is tentatively scheduled to consider this item at its January 28, 2020, regular meeting.

In its offer, Facebook stated its intention to deliver a completed project in 2.5 years. This expedited process will require prioritized and coordinated efforts on the part of all project partners.

"This is an incredibly exciting project that will jump-start a process that normally takes local government many more years to complete," said City Manager Starla Jerome-Robinson. "Combining the work already done by the user groups, community members and staff for the Parks and Recreation Master Plan and the Belle Haven Branch Library study, with this ambitious commitment and generous support from Facebook, and the dedicated passion and lived experience of our Belle Haven community members, I'm confident that this project will create

a next generation community center that is relevant and meaningful to the neighborhood and program participants. Facebook's generosity deserves to be met with our commitment to move quickly and we are up to the challenge."

In addition to the upcoming City Council regular meeting January 28, this project will be discussed at a community meeting planned for Saturday, January 11, 2020, from 10 a.m. to Noon, at the Menlo Park Senior Center located at 110 Terminal Ave. For more information on that meeting, please visit the city website where additional information and updates will be posted as they become available.

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