

**STAFF REPORT****City Council**

Meeting Date: 1/14/2020
Staff Report Number: 20-005-CC

Informational Item: Update on Belle Haven community center and library

Recommendation

The purpose of this information item is to provide the City Council and members of the public an update on Facebook's offer to build a multi-generational community center and library in Belle Haven.

Policy Issues

As an information item, there are no policy issues. Staff will identify any applicable policy issues for the City Council consideration as part of action on the offer.

Background

In October 2019, Facebook announced its intent to collaborate with the community and City to build a new multi-generational community center and library on the site of the current Onetta Harris Community Center, Menlo Park Senior Center and Belle Haven Youth Center located at 100-110 Terminal Avenue.

On December 10, staff provided an Informational Item staff report to provide an update to City Council while awaiting a written offer. In addition, the City Council appointed Council members Carlton and Taylor to an ad hoc subcommittee on this project.

Analysis

This staff report serves as an update on activities since December 10.

On December 16, Facebook submitted an offer letter (Attachment A) for the City Council's consideration. The letter provides some background, as well as an explanation as to why Facebook is making this offer. The letter then outlines a two-phase framework for delivering a new building in 2.5 years, which is extremely accelerated timeline for the construction of a public building. Phase One (Outreach, Design, Space Programming and Approvals) would occur over six months from January to June 2020. Phase Two (Developing Construction Plans and Building) would occur over two years from July 2020 to July 2022, with a goal of starting construction in January 2021. The letter outlines a number of assumptions that will require a concerted, focused effort from Facebook, the community and the City in order to achieve these goals.

Staff met with the City Council subcommittee on December 18 and January 7 to review the offer letter and discuss next steps.

A community meeting will be held on Saturday, January 11 from 10 a.m. to noon in the Senior Center at

110 Terminal Avenue. The meeting will provide an opportunity for people to:

- Learn about Facebook's offer to build a Menlo Park community center and library in the Belle Haven neighborhood
- Provide your thoughts and input on how you'd like to use the proposed facility
- Understand the process and timeline going forward and how community members can be involved

In addition, staff has started identifying a number of issues for which decisions will need to be made over the coming months and how best to efficiently work through the decision making process, such as the following:

- Accepting the offer with any clarifications in order to prioritize the project and proceed with next steps.
- Creating a public engagement plan that reflects any applicable givens from the offer and when and how to receive input.
- Identifying the approach to budgeting and contracting authority specific to this project.
- Confirming that the project would comply with a categorical exemption from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as a replacement of an existing facility
- Identifying the applicable discretionary approvals, which is likely to consist of architectural control, use permit, right of way vacation and abandonment, and heritage tree removals.
- Memorializing the offer in a binding agreement at the appropriate time.
- Revising the current scope of work with Noll & Tam for design assistance on this project.
- Determining whether to reconstruct the existing pool as part of the project and identifying potential funding options, including the use of Measure T recreation bonds.
- Exploring how best to provide interim services during construction.
- Considering the operational opportunities from a combined building compared to multiple facilities.

Some of these items will require decisions by the City Council on January 28 in order to keep the project on track, while other decisions will occur over the coming months.

Public Notice

Public notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with the agenda items being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

Attachments

A. Offer letter from Facebook, dated December 16, 2019

Report prepared by:

Justin Murphy, Deputy City Manager

December 16, 2019

City Council
City of Menlo Park
701 Laurel St.
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Re: Multi-Generational Community Center and Library in Belle Haven

Dear Mayor Mueller and Honorable Members of the City Council:

On behalf of Facebook, I am honored to submit our proposal to explore funding and the development of a new multi-generational community center and library for Menlo Park's Belle Haven neighborhood. This is an incredibly exciting project that will bring vitality and vibrancy to Belle Haven, and ties back to the long-term vision that we share for our surrounding community.

As you know, we have a long history of partnering with the City – dating back to the 2011 Belle Haven & Willow Business Area Design Charrette that we initiated when we moved to Menlo Park. That was the catalyst for our collaboration with the community to realize our shared goals and create a sense of place. Eight years after making Menlo Park our home, our commitment has not wavered, and we are in a strong position to make this donation.

Today, we are presenting the City an opportunity to continue our work together and move these important efforts forward. The purpose of this letter is to suggest a framework for completing the Belle Haven Senior Center and Onetta Harris Community Center as quickly as possible – a project that we know from listening to residents has been a long-desired wish of the community.

Before getting into the framework, I want to address why we're making this significant philanthropic commitment and clarify that the Community Center should be treated as a standalone endeavor that is not connected to any other Facebook project. By providing updated facilities, our goal is to give residents a welcoming place to gather, celebrate and reinforce the social fabric that makes this neighborhood special.

This is an ambitious undertaking but fortunately, we have a head start. Through the City's development of the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan and Belle Haven Branch Library studies – as well as our own engagement – we have direct input from the community, City staff and City Council. We want to thank Mayor ProTem Cecilia Taylor, whose leadership enabled us to begin working with architect Hart Howerton to develop preliminary space/site plans and a conceptual design for the project. We hope our proposal will go a long way in meeting the City and community's desired goals of redeveloping the existing facilities.

With Facebook's bias for action, we can quickly turn this vision into a reality – and we think it's feasible to do so within 2.5 years. This expedited schedule is contingent upon leveraging existing information and achieving consensus among key stakeholders, including community members, City staff and City leadership.

With the above in mind, we propose that the project proceed in two phases as outlined below:

Phase One – Outreach, Design, Space Programming and Approvals

As mentioned above, we have developed a preliminary space plan and building design concept. As a first step in conjunction with the city, we plan to present the concept and preliminary space plan at a community meeting in Belle Haven in mid-January and at a City Council meeting in late January. These meetings will give the city council, community and stakeholders the opportunity to share initial feedback and discuss the types of activities and programs the community would like to have in the new facility.

In February and March, we will hold additional meetings with the community and operations staff to further define the space needs. In January, we'll provide additional information on the community engagement plan and give specific details on the meetings to be held. We envision the meetings will provide additional data on the types of programs the community would like to see run in the new facilities. Facebook will not decide what programs will be operated in the facility, as that will be for the City to determine.

After those meetings, we will consider all the feedback and work with the architect to further refine the floor plans and building design. The updated design will then be presented to the Planning Commission and City Council for approval in the summer of 2020. While the design will need to be refined through the process outlined above, we plan to study the following:

- New youth facilities and a new senior center;
- Health & fitness facilities (gymnasium);
- Incorporation of the proposed Belle Haven Library program into the facility;
- Renovated amenities near the existing swimming pools, such as new locker rooms and additional areas for picnics and gatherings. At this time, Facebook is not offering to pay for a complete reconstruction of the swimming pools; however, we are willing to work with the City to understand what improvements can be accommodated within the budget for the project. Facebook is open to building new pools if additional funding sources are identified by the City or third parties.
- Improved access to Kelly Park by extending pedestrian access through a breezeway in the new building and by better orienting new communal spaces to the park; and
- Additional amenities, such as a new arrival area and improvements to the parking lot, circulation and drop-off zones.

During this phase, we would also complete the following steps:

1. Gather information to ensure that our proposal will meet Menlo Park's existing zoning and building requirements. To keep the project on track, we intend to design a building to meet the parameters of a categorical exemption to satisfy the environmental review – Class 2 replacement of existing facilities.
2. Conduct due diligence on the site to ensure we understand its condition and whether there is anything that may affect the feasibility of the different redevelopment options or inform the design. This involves understanding the parameters for geotechnical conditions, site easements and location of existing site conditions and utilities.
3. Our team will work with the City Manager and the City Attorney to develop an agreement that documents project development details related to design, construction, financing, operations and maintenance.
4. We anticipate that Facebook would act in the capacity of a master developer and be responsible for design and construction, with the scope of our funding commitment contingent on the outcome of the design process. If there are additional items the City would like to see included that are not a part of the fixed budget, such as replacement of the swimming pool, then those items would need to be funded with contributions from the City.

Our interest in this project is driven in large part by our desire to deliver benefits to the community in a relatively short duration. If this initial phase takes more than 6 months, we will reassess whether the project is feasible under the goals we have outlined in this letter.

Phase Two – Developing Construction Plans & Building

During the second phase, we will finalize the technical requirements of the project, develop plans for construction, submit plans to the City for permit and ultimately demolish the existing facilities and construct the facility.

Details related to construction phasing, timing, community notifications and progress reporting would also be developed during this phase. We optimistically believe that we can complete construction within 18 months after receiving the building permit.

Further Clarifications

1. Facebook is proposing that Hart Howerton be the lead project planner and designer and that the City retain a consultant to help guide requirements.
2. While the site plan that we have developed does allow for some of the existing facilities to remain open during construction, it does add risk to the project schedule, and we would need to ensure the public can safely access facilities given the proximity to the new construction. Facebook's preference would be to relocate all existing programs with the expectations of the requirements to maintain access for Beechwood and the soccer fields.

3. The project is expected to be phased, and Facebook will not be responsible for providing temporary facilities during the construction period.
4. We ask that the City Council designate this project as a priority project and direct staff to prioritize timely project approvals and plan check / permitting reviews. Currently, permits can take up to 8 months after projects are approved, and our request for this project is that permits be issued within 2 months of submittal. This will lead to an expedited completion date and ultimately benefit the residents of Menlo Park.
5. We are also requesting that the City cover all costs related to processing of the project approvals, permitting, plan checking and building department inspections.
6. Facebook is not responsible for developing or funding the activities and programs that will be run from the new facility.
7. The City will be responsible for all ongoing operations and maintenance costs associated with operating the facility. Facebook will, however, assign the City any construction warranties it receives.
8. Formal roles and responsibilities between Facebook and the City will need to be established so expectations and lines of communication are clear for all parties. In order to move quickly, communication will need to be streamlined.

Next Steps

As for immediate next steps, we anticipate working with the community and the City to schedule the community outreach and engagement meetings and, with City Council support, proceeding with the tasks outlined in phase one above.

This project is an exciting opportunity to provide a tremendous neighborhood resource that will serve as a community gathering place in Menlo Park, the place we consider home. Thank you for this opportunity, and we look forward to working closely with you, Menlo Park's Belle Haven residents and City staff on this important initiative.

Sincerely,



John Tenanes

cc: Starla Jerome-Robinson, City Manager
William McClure, City Attorney
Deanna Chow, Interim Community Development Director