

Commissioners briefed on La Plata Library plans

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La Plata, MD - The drive to replace the Charles County Public Library's 53-year-old La Plata branch continues with key issues yet to be resolved, such, where to locate the new facility, its size and how to fund the construction project. During the Charles County Commissioners' March 19 meeting, a library official gave the board an update on the plan's status.

Currently, the county government is planning to build a new library that will be slightly larger than the current facility on Garrett Avenue that was opened in 1966. The branch building is just under 13,000-square-feet. "We have to have a larger facility," said Charles County Public Library Interim Executive Director Kenneth Wayne Thompson, who explained obtaining capital funding from the state would require the facility be much larger than what is planned. Thompson said a 30,000 to 35,000-square-foot building would make the county eligible for state funds and would better serve the La Plata area's growing population.

A Power Point presentation from consultant Orange Boy Inc. shows the La Plata Branch's area of dominant influence (ADI) is the widest reaching of all the county's other branches. "The population of the La Plata branch's ADI constitutes almost a third of the county's population," the consultant concluded. The ADI's population is estimated at over 43,000 residents and 15,250 households. Additionally, 95 percent of the ADI's population is above the poverty level and 36 percent of the households have residents under the age of 18.

Currently, two sites that Thompson said meet the needs for a new branch have been identified. The sites—on Washington Avenue and St. Mary's Avenue—could both accommodate a 35,000-square-foot building and provide ample parking. Thompson indicated that town officials prefer the Washington Avenue site.

Commissioner Amanda Stewart [D - District 3], who is an ex officio member of the Charles County Board of Library Trustees (BOLT), expressed her preference for another site. "We have viable land the county owns," said Stewart, who added that taking that option would be "cost-effective."

Charles BOLT President Claudia Bellony-Atanga requested the board vote to amend the county's capital improvements plan (CIP) so that a 35,000-square-foot building for the La Plata Branch replaces the plan for a smaller facility. Commissioners' President Reuben Collins [D] affirmed that modifying the CIP would have to be part of the ongoing budget process. Collins also said the site selection issue also needs to be resolved before the upsize proposal could be considered. Of the library replacement project, Collins declared that it was "certainly a priority item."

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