

Wish list long for new Pictou library

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Eric Stackhouse and his team have been asked to figure out how to fit an elephant and a real rainbow into a new library planned for Pictou.

Those are just two of the requests arising from a series of public consultations about a new 7,500-square-foot facility that would be attached to the town's 33-year-old performing arts theatre, the deCoste Centre.

The most recent consultation attracted about 30 people Sunday afternoon to the deCoste, with family and teen sessions scheduled for Monday and Tuesday. Stackhouse and architect Dale Archibald will meet with community groups as well.

"I'll come out and meet with anybody," said Stackhouse, chief librarian for the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library system.

Participants shared their dreams of meeting spaces for community groups, a sheltered spot to leave dogs and baby strollers outside, a telescope, a public kitchen, local art and heritage expressed in the design and architecture, a fireplace, built-in mechanisms to observe the solstices and celestial sky, a view of the harbour, local stone and wood in the construction, connecting the building to a nearby walking trail, wheelchair accessibility and other features.

They pointed out the need for parking, adequate public washrooms and wheelchair accessibility, and expressed concern about library activities clashing with those of the theatre, whether noise, the deCoste bar, parking or open hours.

Property size and building laws mean the addition will take place on two sides of the existing deCoste building, which will be upgraded to save energy and share maintenance systems with the library. Stackhouse said he expects most of the wish list can be met, and there are ways to mitigate concerns.

The library is growing out of its current site on an upper floor at the town hall. Merging a new facility with the town-owned deCoste would benefit both, Stackhouse said. For instance, event space could be shared and maintenance costs slashed.

While Stackhouse is leading the project, the committee includes municipal councillors and management from both the town and county of Pictou, as well as representation from the library. Usage of the Pictou library is split about half between town residents and surrounding county areas.

Nothing about the building is "carved in stone," he said. The planning process follows the successful "placemaking" model used for the Antigonish, New Glasgow and River John

libraries. It involves consultation before designing the building, followed by detailed costing, then fundraising and construction.

So far, most suggestions revolve around themes of gathering, celebrating local history and culture with a unique building, activities for all ages and maintaining connections with the harbour and other points in the town, Stackhouse said.

He urged people to think about the information they received and then contact him with their ideas, by email or telephone or asking for a meeting.

“I’ll take your ideas any way I can get them,” he said.

He expects the architect will have a design early in 2016.

More information is available at parl.ns.ca, under Pictou Library Project.