

Town Council Public Comment

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Name: Matt Blumenfeld

Comment: Dear Trustees, Councilors & Town Administrators:

I am writing as a long term resident and taxpayer to express my hope that the Town and Library will continue to pursue the Jones Renovation & Expansion project through a rebidding for a GC and subcontractors. Like all of you, I was deeply disappointed by the sole GC bid submitted by Fontaine Bros, which was \$6.5 million over our budget. But let's not give up hope - let's please give it one more try!

As some of you know, I have been a strong advocate of the renovation/expansion for many years. Furthermore, for full-disclosure purposes, our company is engaged professionally by the Friends of the Jones to help secure institutional commitments for the capital campaign. This professional work has resulted in some significant commitments to the project - NEH Grant, Additional Allocation from MBLC, Bank Grants & MassCultural Facilities Fund Grant. I have also worked on more than 30 other library capital projects in the Commonwealth & beyond. My wife and I have also volunteered hundreds of hours of our time over the past decade for the Jones to raise funds for the building project and for library operations via events and the annual fund. We love the Jones Library System and believe that this project is essential to the future of our community.

It seems to me that the bidding process could have done more to bring in multiple, competitive bids, and while I am not seeking to cast blame, I think the OPM, the Architects, Town Administrators, Library Trustees and the Library Building Committee all shoulder responsibility for what has occurred. That said, I believe that it makes sense to learn from this experience and seek to rebid in the early fall of 2024.

Here are some suggestions/observations:

1. Optics Matter - (As does timing) - The large number of Addenda to the bid documents - while certainly explicable - did not help to attract bidders. Even though the vast majority of the Addenda were minor in scope, contractors likely viewed this as a red flag. If there are going to be substantial Addenda for the rebid, I think it is imperative that the OPM spend time to explain their scope to the potential bidders and assure them that this is not a warning sign of trouble

ahead. Contractors do not operate in a vacuum. They are well aware of the conditions, political or otherwise, that exist in a community. It is critical for our community leaders to present a united front and demonstrate commitment to completing the project at the budget that has been approved. Please be as clear and transparent as possible during the rebid process - it will help convince contractors that we are serious about getting this done and getting it done on budget.

2. The Town's share of this project cost is significant but this is being subsidized by a huge state investment and an equally huge private fundraising initiative.

3. The Jones is the Town's Library. Please make that clear to all. There is no conflict of interest between the Jones and Town. The fact that we have private funding paying for any of this project should be viewed with true gratitude.

4. The people who have vocally opposed this project have often resorted to mud slinging and outright lies. They should be called-out for their falsehoods. Here are their names - Jeff Lee, Carol Gray, Sara McKee (no longer a resident), Maria Kopicki, Art Keene, Peggy and Sig Nillson and to a lesser extent, Ira Bryck, Christina Platt, Ken Rosenthal and a few others. These people are doing our Town real harm. In large part because of them and their constant falsehoods and rumor mongering, this project has been delayed by more than a year - WHICH IS THE PRIMARY DRIVER OF THE INCREASED CONSTRUCTION COSTS. This was true of the school project as much as the Library. As a taxpayer, I am furious that these unelected and unelectable trouble makers have forced all of us to collectively pay tens of millions of dollars more in taxes. Please stop paying heed to their bullying tactics, when they are based upon lies and malicious innuendo.

5. Real evidence demonstrates that this project will only grow more expensive if the project is delayed for several more years, as it definitely will be if we don't rebid. The MBLC's next grant round is taking place now, and that means if we turn down our current grant, it will be another 5+ years before another opportunity arises. The \$15+ million in state grant funding will go to some other community...

6. The benefits of this project will accrue to all of us for decades to come. We have a responsibility to steward the facilities in our Town to benefit both ourselves and generations to come.

In conclusion, please stay the course, at least until another bid process has been completed. The stakes are high, but working together, I am confident that you, our leaders, can get this done. Our children and grandchildren will thank you.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Matt Blumenfeld

335 Middle Street

Matthew A. Blumenfeld

Principal

Financial Development Agency

www.FinancialDevelopmentAgency.com

Office (413) 253-0239

Mobile (212) 727-1404