

Meeting Notes  
Shadow Creek Library Meeting, May 22, 2008

The meeting began at 6:30 p.m. as planned. There was a brief introduction of elected and government employees. At least 50 Shadow Creek residents attended.

Representing the City of Pearland were Mayor Tom Reid, Council Members Helen Beckman, Steve Saboe, Kevin Kole and Felicia Kyle. City Manager Bill Eisen attended.

Representing Brazoria County were Precinct 4 Commissioner Mary Ruth Rhodenbaugh, and her Administrative Assistant Kay Evans-Milsap, Precinct 3 Commissioner Jack Harris, County Librarian Catherine H. Threadgill and Assistant Director Larry White. Precinct 3 Commissioner-elect Stacey Adams attended.

Tom Bates, Alvin Community College Librarian, attended.

Commissioner Rhodenbaugh who organized the meeting moderated and made a brief opening statement. This meeting had been called in response to strong public demand for library service in west Pearland. There could be no promises made, but the meeting should be viewed as a barnstorming session to start defining the problem and to determine what could be done. A request for attendee's names and email addresses (appended) was made and a pad and pen were passed around the room. Commissioner Rhodenbaugh opened the discussion by asking County Librarian Cathy Threadgill what her opinions were. Wishing to ascertain public desires, this question was asked to those in attendance.

It quickly became evident that there was a great deal of public unhappiness with the lack of library service within convenient driving distance to the community – driving times to the Pearland Library of over 30 minutes being cited as an example. There was also unhappiness with the lack of progress building a library in the location the developers had designated—the presence of a sign denoting a planned library being a factor in some resident's choice to buy in the development. Comm. Rhodenbaugh asked the Pearland City Manager about this site's dimensions and ownership. Mr. Eisen stated that the land was city owned and dimensions would be forthcoming. There was some discussion that the site might not be large enough for a library. There was some discussion about city funding since Pearland had just started large, seven-year capital improvement projects last year.

Discussion then started on options. There were short-term, intermediate and long term options.

The short-term option could be a bookmobile. Ms. Threadgill described how a bookmobile service might work, being based at the Pearland Library and making stops throughout the north county area. Service would concentrate on children's materials and delivery of adult materials from online requests. There would be some technical hurdles

to overcome concerning wireless communications. This service would offer the greatest flexibility but only a minimum of service. Residents were unenthusiastic about this option.

The intermediate option was the creation of a storefront branch. A four to five thousand square foot branch could be leased in the area. Ms. Threadgill described the attractive features to this option. It could be relatively fast to implement and would require at least six staff members. A meeting room for public meetings and library programs would be essential while the collection would concentrate heavily on juvenile materials. She felt that adult reading materials could be easily supplemented by the other branches in the county through inter-branch loans. During later discussions, Councilmembers Steve Saboe and Kevin Kole estimated that annual leasing expenses could amount to \$120,000.

At this time several residents mentioned other alternatives. A public library-school library combination was described and the possibility of a joint venture with PISD's new Dawson High School was mentioned. Ms Threadgill and several City Councilmembers mentioned problems with this solution. Most schools, for security reasons, do not want the general public on or around campuses during school hours. However one resident described a combination in Corpus Christi where the library was not part of the school but a separate, adjacent entity. At this time the Pearland City Manager summarized the City-County contract and how our current library system operates with the cities providing facilities and furnishing while the county provides staff and materials. Since the current contract was written for cities having only one library, there would have to be some revisions. Cathy Threadgill stated that over time, the county assumes around 75% of the operating expenses. The residents were much more enthusiastic about a storefront solution and wondered what the next step would be. Councilmember Saboe stated this meeting was the 'first step' in the process and a good time to discuss the relationship.

The long-term option was the creation of a branch in the northwest corner of Brazoria County, not necessarily in the Shadow Creek subdivision, but serving the entire area. A question was raised by a resident about the purposes of the current City of Pearland capital development plan. Councilmember Saboe stated that this plan involved more than public buildings and a major emphasis was on transportation improvements to better tie in the communities in the west to other parts of the city. It was planned that the existing library be expanded as part of this improvement scheme.

At this time Commissioner Rhodenbaugh asked if it would be possible for the city to staff a facility and the county to build a facility. This interesting idea would require a radical change in the relationship between the two entities. In response to a question, Ms. Threadgill estimated that a 30,000 ft<sup>2</sup> facility might suffice and the cost would run between \$10 and 12 million.

Discussion quickly began on funding and whether the intermediate option might be a less desirable use of funds given the great expense and inherent limitations of a small storefront operation. Mayor Reid mentioned that the standard commercial foundation might not be strong enough to handle the very heavy load of shelved books which will

increase the building expense. It was felt that a Task Force may be the best way to determine the needs. Councilmember Kyle stated that some hard figures, the development costs and the operation costs were needed.

Some residents questioned the purpose of a library and what other options were. There seemed to be a consensus that supporting materials for children was critical, a meeting space and programs was important. One resident asked if library service might be most easily handled through a 'books by mail' operation with the system mailing materials requested by patrons. There were concerns about the tax burdens a large facility would cause and funding options were mentioned from corporations who might assist funding for 'naming rights' to offset building costs or assist operating expenses through book grants. Commissioner Harris then mentioned a library friends group to spearhead fundraising. Ms. Threadgill made a quick summary and description of what library friends groups have done for other libraries in the county. Commissioner Rhoden-baugh stated that even the bookmobile option would cost an estimated \$500,000 to fully implement. Councilmembers Saboe and Kole estimated that a large facility would add about \$.01 per hundred dollar valuation to property taxes. Residents were unwilling to wait 'years' for results.

Commissioner Rhodenbaugh stated that the Task Force idea with representation from the County, City of Pearland and residents. Mayor Reid suggested Councilmember Helen Beckman. Another participant mentioned that finding someone with real estate knowledge would be desirable. This Task Force would be responsible to

- determine costs
- explore funding models both long and intermediate options.
- explore case studies of other, similar situations and how problems were resolved.
- collect 'metrics', current library users from the 288 corridor (west of FM 1128 to the county line) and the possible impact a new branch would have on use at the current Pearland Library.
- search for potential partners.
- determine location.

Councilmember Saboe stated that the current capital improvement plans allocated \$3.4 million for expansion to the existing facility, but that this was only in early planning and probably should be reviewed. However, these funds could not be used for a west Pearland branch without voter approval. The original building was planned for a population of 30,000. A Friends of the Library group should also be established quickly.

Volunteers for the Task Force:

Felicia Kyle  
Anu Mahesh  
Enid Henderson  
Ram Adharapurapu  
The Tonini family

Mike Choyke  
Keri King  
Amit Joshi  
Katrina Barnes  
Anita Phipps

Joan Riggs  
Marie Ferguson

Gaelyn Stanley

The County Librarian will also participate, and city staff members were invited.

A meeting was scheduled for Thursday evening, June 5 at 7:00 p.m. at the Silver Lake Visitors center.

Citizens were invited to participate in a Pearland City Council workshop to be held soon at a west side location. More information on this and other City of Pearland activities are listed on the city's website. Email distributions for areas of interest are available.