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Library plan gets green light

\$1 million bonding from state still in question; council wants to help

By **BARBARA THOMAS**
FOR THE AVON NEWS

AVON — After putting a two-month hold on finalization of design and construction documents for the Avon Free Public

Library expansion and renovation project, the Town Council gave the Library Building Committee the green light to resume work at its meeting on June 3.

The council, for the past two months, has voted to halt the

project until hearing from the State Bond Commission regarding receipt of the \$1 million grant for which the library was approved by the State Library Board.

Avon is one of four towns that were each approved for \$1 mil-

lion for library work. The Bond Commission has cancelled its regular meetings in recent months, and none of the four library projects have been on its special meeting agendas.

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The commission once again held off in May, and another meeting is not scheduled until June 28.

"I'm in favor of moving forward with the construction documents," Council Chair Mark Zachio said, and of limiting the project to \$18.5 million. If we get the \$1 million grant, we can reduce the bonding, borrowing \$7 million."

The project was estimated to cost \$9.5 million, and in a referendum last October, voters approved bonding \$8 million. The balance was to be covered by the \$1 million state grant and \$500,000 through fundraising by the library board of Trustees, an effort that is well under way.

Savings have already been identified in reducing the original estimate to make up for the \$1 million the town may not receive, it was noted.

According to Peter Wells of Tuthill and Wells, the Avon-based architectural firm hired for the design work, there are three categories of savings.

For one, the library board has decided that during the construction process, they will stay on the premises, perhaps changing their hours somewhat, rather than using the vacant building at 20 Security Drive, as had been considered and which would have involved paying rent.

"A non-quantitative benefit of staying in the building is that

people can watch the progress and that helps with fundraising," he said.

The second factor is that oil prices had been estimated higher than what the actual rates may be, Wells said, and the third category of savings is furniture.

"It was assumed that all new furniture would be purchased, but the board has identified what pieces can be reused," he said.

Asked for a ballpark figure of how much the savings amount to, Wells answered that it is in the range of \$700,000 to \$800,000.

He also noted that the bidding climate should still be in the town's favor in two months, when the construction documents should be completed.

Enterprise Builders of Newington has been hired to oversee the project, which will double the library's space from 18,000 to 40,000 square feet and completely renovate the building.

Councilor Doug Evans expressed concern that residents would still be getting the project they had voted on at referendum.

"Will we be delivering the same project?" he asked.

He was assured by other councilors and building committee members that they would.

"We're maintaining the integrity of the project," Councilor Bill Shea said.

"Everyone who voted knows we support the project," Councilor David Pena said.

Zachio noted that the state has never opted against giving the grants approved by the State Library Board.

"We may be the first," he said. The challenge will now be to find another \$300,000 in savings, or in additional fundraising, to make up the shortfall if the grant is not received.

On the other hand, all agreed that if the \$1 million grant is received, that reducing the amount the town has to borrow by \$1 million is a positive.

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