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Memo To: Sharon Sharry, Jones Library Director
From: Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director
Subject: Analysis of Library Sites

This memo represents an analysis of potential alternative sites for a town center library. The review criteria provided included the following, which informed both site selection and site analysis:

- The site needs to be able to be able to handle a 100,000 square foot building;
- Be close to the center of town;
- On/near a bus route;
- Near parking;
- If the property is not already owned by the town, the cost of the property should be estimated.

Staff included two additional siting and review criteria:

- Prominent street front location and visibility, and;
- Close proximity to other public and private cultural and civic destinations in the downtown.

Public libraries provide central community functions and services for citizens and as a result are possessed of a civic significance similar to that of town halls, public schools, community centers, and, historically, churches. For that reason, public libraries should preferentially be sited in centers and in prominent, highly visible, and easy-to-find locations. Similarly, there is a natural mutually-supportive synergy between the community services provided by libraries and those available in other public and private cultural and civic destinations.

This analysis assumes that “close to the center of town” means either within Amherst town center (defined as the downtown General Business or Limited Business districts) or within ready walking distance (5-10 minutes) of the town center.

Libraries as a public land use are permitted by right under Planning Board Site Plan Review (SPR) approval in all zoning districts.

Existing park or common sites—the central Town Common, Sweetser Park, and Kendrick Park—are not considered to be available for library purposes and are not included in this analysis. Neither are properties owned by Amherst College.

All prospective rezoning used as the basis for assessing potential build-out for a library building would require a 2/3s vote of Amherst Town Meeting. It should be understood that this is a difficult threshold to achieve.

Please see the attached map for the locations of sites analyzed for the purpose of this study. Reasons for the exclusion of some Town-owned and privately-owned sites are described under the applicable sections.

Town-Owned Sites

For reasons of cost and centrality, sites within or near the downtown that are already publicly owned will be examined first.

A number of other highly central Town properties are already developed for significant and in some case longstanding historic uses, are extremely unlikely to change, and are not included as a part of this analysis. These include the properties of the Amherst Town Hall, the Bangs Community Center, and the Amherst Police Station.

Others centrally-located properties owned by the Town or other public entities are too small. The Central Fire Station is scheduled to be replaced with another building in a more remote location, but the property includes only 9,764 sq. ft. It would make sense for library use only if it were annexed to the current library property to facilitate expansion of the current library, whose property it abuts on the east.

The central Post Office property consists of 21,234 sq. ft. Even if the U.S. Post Office were interested in disposing of the property—and recent discussions with developers who have approached the Post Office for their own reasons indicate that it is not—a maximum build-out on the site could yield a gross floor area (GFA) of only 74,319 sq. ft. in a five story building and too little area to develop needed parking.

Site #1 - Jones Library

It makes sense to begin the analysis with a review of the current library site, in order to allow comparisons. The current library property is 41,817 sq. ft. in area. It is located within the General Business (B-G) District in Amherst town center. In the B-G District, the maximum allowed building coverage is 70%, which result in a building footprint of 29,272 sq. ft. A maximum of five (5) floors is allowed in the B-G District. A four story building with a foot print of 29,272 sq. ft. would provide 117,088 sq. ft. of gross floor area (GFA), more than the 100,000 sq. ft. requirement, and leaving room for an entire additional floor.

The current library site is one of the most central sites in the downtown. It is located within 110 feet of the central intersection in downtown Amherst. It is on several active and regular PVRTA bus routes. Library patrons have access to approximately 393 public parking spaces within less than 5 minutes' walk of the library itself, many of them visible from the library itself. These include 176 metered public parking spaces (on-street and off-street lots) within 500 feet of the library, another 180 metered public spaces in the Boltwood Walk parking garage within 600 feet, and another 37 metered public spaces within 720 feet in the Spring Street lot in the Town Common.

The current library site abuts a combined public/private parking area to the north which is also a potential site for downtown redevelopment and has been under consideration for development of an off-street parking facility for decades. Town ownership of 2/3s of the parking area creates an opportunity for expansion of the library to the north and, in concert with redevelopment of the parking area, direct pedestrian connection to additional new parking supply and other mixed-uses.

The Jones Library site is within ready walking distance of other important Town sites providing public services—the Town Hall, Bangs Community Center, the Central Fire Station, and the Amherst Police Station. It is located directly across the street from the principal site of private cultural activity in the downtown—the Amherst Cinema complex, which includes three separate theaters. The library is within 5-10 minutes walking distance of the Amherst College campus, which includes the Frost Library, Mead Art Museum, Pratt Natural Science Museum, Johnson Chapel and Kirby Theater. It is a similar distance from the Emily Dickinson Museum, and that proximity allows it to be one of the regular stops on Emily Dickinson tours. It is very close to the Amherst Town Common—a site of year-round cultural activity and events. The library is immediately adjacent to, and shares some facilities and resources with, the private Amherst History Museum at the Strong House, which is also a regular stop on Emily Dickinson tours.

Because of its central location, access to parking, and proximity to other public and private destinations, the Jones Library is the most heavily-visited public facility or destination of any kind in downtown Amherst.

Site #2 - Gates Lot

The Gates lot (named for former owner Florence Gates) is located at the northeast corner of Main and Churchill Streets. Part of a former private park, it was originally acquired by the Town of Amherst in 1916 by eminent domain to serve as the site for a future town library. In 1928, after the Jones Library had been sited on Amity Street instead of the Gates lot, the Town petitioned the state legislature to change the purpose of the original Gates lot taking to “hereafter hold and use the same for public park purposes.” Changing the public purpose of town acquisition of the property at this point would require a 2/3s vote of both houses of the Massachusetts legislature.

The Gates lot has a long history of being used for park purposes. It has been landscaped with ornamental and memorial trees and is the site of a public artwork memorializing Amherst poets Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost. Despite some historic filling and draining, it is part of a former swamp, is located at the bottom of a slope, and is regularly wet. The Gates lot is a highly visible

and central feature of the Dickinson National Historic Register District—it is located immediately adjacent to (west of) the Emily Dickinson Museum properties.

The Gates lot includes 17,663 sq. ft. in area. It is currently located in the General Residence (R-G) District, where the maximum building coverage is 25%, which would constitute a footprint of 4,416 sq. ft. A maximum of three (3) floors is allowed in the R-G District. A three floor building with a foot print of 4,416 sq. ft. would provide only 13,247 sq. ft. of GFA, well short of the 100,000 sq. ft. requirement. Both building coverage and maximum floors can be modified under a discretionary Special Permit, but the degree of modification necessary would be very extensive.

A rezoning of the property from R-G to B-G is possible, but not assured. If it occurred, then the maximum building coverage would be 70% (a 12,364 sq. ft. footprint), the maximum floors five (5), and the total possible GFA would still only be 68,820 sq. ft.—still inadequate to meet the requirement.

Immediately adjacent on-street parking includes public metered spaces, but library use of the spaces would be competing with their use for the Emily Dickinson Museum. The site is within 525 feet of the 180 space Boltwood Walk parking garage and several other smaller public parking lots a greater distance away.

Site #3 - Triangle Street Recreation property

Located near the northeast corner of the downtown there is a Town recreation property (Assessors Map 11D, Parcel 270) with frontage on Triangle Street. It has a lot area of 91,476 sq. ft. The property is currently occupied by the garage of the Town's Parks and Recreation Division. It is bisected by an exit drive and sidewalk connecting the adjacent regional high school property to the north end of the downtown. It includes portions of adjacent playing fields used by the high school. It is adjacent to the complex of recreation properties that include the War Memorial Pool and Ziomek Field.

For the purpose of this analysis, an optimistic assumption is made that the existing three uses on this property could be relocated or discontinued and the site made available exclusively for library purposes. Those changes are not assured. The site has also long been planned as one potential location for a community recreation center.

The property's current zoning is General Residence (R-G), and a build-out under that zoning would yield a 3 story building with a GFA of 68,607 sq. ft. Assuming a successful rezoning to the nearest abutting business district—Limited Business (B-L)—the yield would increase to a GFA of 96,050 sq. ft. in a building with a maximum of 3 stories. If a request for an ancillary Special Permit to modify the requirement for maximum floors was also successful, a four story building on the site would yield a GFA of 128,068 sq. ft.

The challenge would then be to find or create sufficient parking for a library on or near the site. The maximum lot coverage requirements in the B-L District would allow covering another 32,017 sq. ft.

of the property with pavement (including sidewalks). Using the standard industry measure of 330 sq. ft. per parking space (which includes not only the spaces itself but accompanying entrances/exits, drive aisles, etc.), and assuming the geometry of the site would permit it, using 30,000 sq. ft. of lot coverage for on-site parking would yield only 91 parking spaces.

There is a single public parking lot (the Pray Street lot) located within 450 feet of the site, which currently contains 32 metered and leased parking spaces. All other parking within more than 800 feet occurs in numerous private parking lots, most of which are reserved for patrons or employees. Additional public parking for the library would have to be assembled and purchased, using eminent domain to clear the title.

Currently, no public transit lines use Triangle Street. The bus stop nearest to this site is located approximately 900 feet to the west on East Pleasant Street. It might, however, be possible to redirect local bus lines to the site.

Privately-Owned Sites

Any use of private properties in the downtown for a new public library location would require assembly and purchase/acquisition of more than one property at considerable cost, including the costs associated with demolition and removal of existing buildings and any the usual unforeseen site clean-up issues that may arise in long-used urban settings.

Any contribution of Town funding to the acquisition of a property by the Jones Library Trustees would require a majority vote by Amherst Town Meeting. Any acquisition of a property interest by the Town (rather than the Library Trustees) for the benefit of acquiring a public library site would require a 2/3s vote of Town Meeting.

Estimated Purchase Prices - This study does not include appraisals of the properties examined. Instead, current assessed values are given and an estimated purchase price figure is derived using a value per square foot taken from the newly-assessed value of the most recently-developed downtown properties.

A property at 57 East Pleasant Street is currently under construction for a five story mixed-use building and is as a consequence now assessed at \$5,782,800, or \$422/sq. ft. of lot area. One quarter of that valuation would be \$106/sq. ft. of lot area—the figure used for purchase price estimation in this study. Property owners are well aware of these increased land values and that would be a factor in acquiring any private land for a public library site.

Several potential downtown private properties are too small. For instance, a property at 26 Spring Street owned by the Pacific Lodge of Masons is vacant and located near (though not facing onto) the Common, but it contains only 15,016 sq. ft. and could accommodate a five story building of only 52,556 sq. ft. in gross floor area (GFA).

Other downtown private properties might be feasible from the standpoint of their size and location, but the sites' uses are important, viable, and/or iconic. Their owners are unlikely to be interested in the sale of their properties for a public library, and the removal of the uses they support would be unlikely to be supported by the community (including Town Meeting). These sites include several prominent church properties, a long-established funeral home, a Masonic Lodge, and some existing commercial sites.

Here are some of the more feasible private sites within or adjacent to the town center:

Site #4 – 159-161 North Pleasant Street

This site consists of two properties—161 North Pleasant Street (a current Mobil gas station) and 159 North Pleasant Street, a rear property accessed via an easement that contains an abandoned and mostly derelict building formerly housing an early car dealership and bowling alley. The gas station property has frontage on North Pleasant Street, a principal downtown travel corridor. The derelict building can currently be reached only over the gas station property.

Both properties are in the General Business (B-G) and if combined would total 37,028 sq. ft. in area. The 70% building coverage requirement would produce a building with a foot print of 29,920 sq. ft. A five story building with that footprint would create a GFA of 129,600 sq. ft.

Purchase Price - The FY 15 assessed (not appraised) value of the two properties totals \$734,400. Given the recent purchase and redevelopment of private properties in the vicinity for multiple millions of dollars, an estimated purchase price would be over \$3.9 million.

Parking – The site is within 650 feet of the 180 space Boltwood Walk parking garage and another 20 spaces within Boltwood Walk, within 600 feet of the approximately 77 space public parking lot behind CVS Pharmacy, and within about 500 feet of approximately 32 on-street metered spaces along North Pleasant Street. About 16 surface parking spaces could be built on-site outside of the building.

This is a potentially prominent and central location in the downtown, located along the main north-south travel corridor. It is on major bus routes and adjacent to bus stops. It is located within walking distance of most downtown public and private destinations.

Limiting factors include the cost of demolition and site clean-up. The gas station property has had problems with environmental issues (leaking underground fuel tanks) in the past, and it is not certain that those issues have been dealt with. Past use of the derelict building property for an early car dealership indicates the likelihood of similar site contamination, for which no site environmental analyses have been done.

Site #5 - 33-37 East Pleasant Street

This property has frontage on East Pleasant Street, a principal downtown way, and offers the opportunity to be combined with the abutting Town-owned Pray Street parking lot to its east.

Combined, the two properties would total 49,298 sq. ft. in lot area. Located in the B-G District, a 70% building coverage requirement would produce a building with a foot print of 34,509 sq. ft. A four story building with that footprint would create a GFA of 138,036 sq. ft. Five stories are possible.

Limiting factors would be the purchase price of the private lot and the availability of parking.

Purchase Price - The FY 15 assessed (not appraised) value of the private lot is \$654,300. An estimated purchase price would be over \$4.8 million.

Parking – Building a library on these combined properties would involve displacement of the existing 32 space Pray Street lot. However, a library design might be envisioned that involved a five story building, the upper four floors of which would constitute the library proper. The building could have a street front ground floor entrance foyer on the west facing onto East Pleasant Street and could redevelop the remainder of the ground floor for internal covered parking. Such a layout might be able to accommodate as many as 70-75 parking spaces on-site.

The site is potentially prominent, being located on a major north-south travel corridor in the downtown, and opposite a public park (Kendrick Park). It is located immediately adjacent to bus stops.

Access to other public parking would be very limited, unless such parking were created on still other currently private properties. The vast majority of parking within ready walking distance is privately-owned. There are seven (7) metered spaces about 190 feet away across Kendrick Park on North Pleasant Street. Beyond that, the next closest metered parking is on-street, about 500 feet away on the west side of North Pleasant Street south of its intersection with East Pleasant at Hallock Street.

Site #6 - 75 East Pleasant/231 Triangle Street

This site would require the acquisition of one private property and the partial acquisition of another. It has the advantage of being located at one corner of a major downtown intersection, on current bus lines. It is located about 1,500 feet from the southeast edge of the UMass campus. It has the disadvantage of being located in the north end of the downtown where there is little public parking, and its construction would have to include creation of its own parking.

The corner property at 75 East Pleasant is owned by the Bank of America, is occupied by an unmanned drive-up bank facility. It includes 27,929 sq. ft. in area and is assessed at \$358,900.

The property at 231 Triangle Street abuts the first property on the east. It is occupied by two single-story retail/office buildings. It includes 106,722 sq. ft. and is assessed at \$1,667,800.

Under the current B-L zoning, the entirety of the 75 East Pleasant Street property and about 67,500 sq. ft. of the 231 Triangle Street property would be needed to build a three story library consisting of 100,000 sq. ft. of GFA.

Purchase Price - Both properties are located in the B-L District north of Triangle Street and the purchase price of both properties would likely be considerably higher. The property at 57 East Pleasant Street immediately south across Triangle Street is under construction for a five story mixed-use building and is now assessed at \$5,782,800, or \$422/sq. ft. of lot area. That valuation would be very much in the minds of the private owners of the two subject properties across the street. Applying ¼ of that valuation (\$106/sq. ft. lot area) to the minimum area of the two properties needed to build a library would result in a total valuation of over \$10 million. Applying it to the total area of the two properties would result in a total valuation of \$14.2 million.

Parking - It would be advisable to acquire all of the 231 Triangle Street property to provide for as much on-site parking as possible in association with a library here. The remaining 39,222 sq. ft. of the site not needed for a library could be redeveloped to produce about 115-118 parking spaces, assuming the geometry of the site would allow it.

Site #7 - 29 Cottage Street (#6)

Located in the Limited Business (B-L District north of Triangle Street, this 48,787 sq. ft. property would require a rezoning to B-G in order to be viable. If such a rezoning was successful, the property could accommodate a 3 story library totaling 102,453 sq. ft.

Purchase Price – The current assessed value of the property is \$1,212,000. An estimated purchase price would be over \$5.1 million.

Parking - As with all other potential sites in the north end of the downtown, the availability of parking would be a significant limiting factor as previously described. Unless the library went up to four floors (under B-G zoning) and included ground-level parking within the building, only about 22 parking spaces could be accommodated on the remaining allowable lot coverage.

This site has some locational disadvantages. It is not on bus lines and is not as centrally located within the downtown. It would be located approximately 1,250 feet from the regional high school. Triangle Street is a major commuting corridor between the University of Massachusetts and origins or destinations to the east, but its prior development as a peripheral edge of the downtown has been dominated by single story ‘highway corridor’ buildings and uses. Other than its proximity to the regional high school, this site is not prominent within the downtown, nor is it currently close to existing public or private civic/cultural destinations in the downtown.



This analysis indicates that the current Jones Library site is the most central available site for a public library in Amherst and within downtown Amherst. It is an existing facility on a property of sufficient area to accommodate an expanded building of 100,000 sq. ft. through by-right permitting under current zoning regulations. The site has full access to public transit. It is proximate to more existing metered public parking than any other site examined, and is located immediately adjacent to

the downtown site most likely to be next developed for expanded off-site public parking. It has been a prominent, defining public site for Amherst's downtown for over 85 years.