



To: Amherst Town Council

From: Claudia Pazmany on behalf of the Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors

CC: Town Manager Paul Bockelman  
Library Trustees  
Library Director Sharon Sharry  
Amherst Business Improvement District (BID) Executive Director Gabrielle Gould

Date: March 29, 2021

**Re: Letter of Support for the Jones Library Expansion & Renovation to the Town Council Submitted respectfully by the Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce**

As the Executive Director of the Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce, whose mission is to create, maintain and promote a vital, thriving business climate throughout the Amherst area I write to share its support of the Expansion/Renovation proposal made by the Jones Library. As a Chamber, we recognize the enormous, daily economic and socio-economic contributions of our Jones Library.

The Expansion/Renovation plans as eloquently described by its board and key stakeholders at the public meeting on February 22, 2021 showcased every reason why our Chamber supports such a project.

With steady approval from Town Meeting to apply for the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) grant, the library is now poised to change its own story. While preserving its historic character, they found a way to add light, add larger, brighter new spaces, while opening some of its most historic spaces back to the public, while meeting our Climate Action goals, a newly formed, library will be born.

But this also means change. None of us love change but it is for the greater economic good. According to the board presentation, our library is among the 20th busiest libraries in the state, but OVER TEN YEARS AGO, after a study of our library, an MBLC staff member called out our Jones Library as “the most dysfunctional public library in the state.” The Chamber views this as a true call to action with a process that has been ten years in the making.

As home to the Five Colleges, among them a top research institution making advancements in research – from the first images of the Black Hole to landing the rover on Mars, to contributions to the vaccine – we, as a Chamber demand a library that reflects those values...of advancements in education, research, and programming with accessibility for ALL.

The total project cost sits at \$36million. The grant is \$13.8 million with the trustees committing to raising \$6.6million with a remaining cost to the Town at \$15.7million. In an economic sense...it not only

makes good sense to invest now, when interest rates are at their lowest, the likes of which we will not see again in years to come. We recognize that we are risk averse, but this is another reason to take on the \$15 million debt. And this plan includes completely finished spaces, including shelving and furniture, along with updated computer and technology. Our last renovation was in 1993, nearly 30 years ago. Congruent with other approved projects for our downtown, our Town is moving toward steady progress. This is a giant piece of making our emergence from a post COVID world, an enormous success. We are ready.

When Town Council asked for greater detail in the comparison between the proposed project vs. the repair option, the presentation again illuminated that the band-aid approach to repairing the current building and replacing some of its current systems prices out in the range of \$14 and \$16 million, which does NOT include upgrades in furniture, technology and shelving. And with either of these options, we would yet again, refuse a \$13.8 million dollar state grant to help Amherst offer state-of-the-art technology and advanced design and still put an equivalent \$15 million minimum on the backs of our town budget. No one needs a \$15 million band aid.

We know it serves nearly 230,000 unique visitors (in a normal year, pre-COVID) and as Sharon Sharry outlined, if each of those visitors, spent \$5 in town – whether on parking or a coffee or soup – that is a \$1.15 million annual reinvestment in our community in an economic perspective. This is often referred to as ‘halo spending’ by economic experts, stopping in one establishment as a part of a longer list of errands and spending at establishments in close proximity. Again, with an active library, it increases the likelihood of spending at our small businesses in downtown Amherst thus promoting a positive economic impact.

In addition, the newly expanded library would have space to host meetings of all varieties – community conversations, educational and cultural programming, and a special space for fundraisers, attracting more to our downtown.

A strong library adds value and to prospective homebuyers, they perceive library access as part of an enhanced quality of life. Ultimately, with an expansion & renovation, increases in the use of Library resources are highly likely and will contribute greatly to learning, literacy, business productivity, personal and professional development, and individual livelihood. All contributing to the idea that a strong library truly adds economic and socio-economic benefits to our Town, to the Town we choose to work & live, and as we plan for a post-COVID revisioning, now is the time to emerge stronger and smarter.

The Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce, with the full support of its Board of Trustees, respectfully submits this letter of support for a vote in favor of the Expansion and Renovation of our highly respected Jones Library. Thank you.

*Respectfully submitted by the Amherst Area Chamber Board Directors. Prepared by Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, Claudia Pazmany.*

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