

OLD LIBRARY ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE
FINAL REPORT – JANUARY 2020

The Old Library Accessibility Committee was appointed by the Board of Selectmen in January 2016 and charged with investigating potential options for providing handicap access to the Old Library and, based on its investigation, recommend a preferred option. The Committee was comprised of 4 members: Selectmen Leo Blair and Lucy Wallace, Mark Mikitarian, representing the Harvard Cultural Collaborative, and Wendy Cote-Magan, an architect. Mikitarian was elected chair. In April Ken Swanton replaced Leo Blair whose term as Selectmen had ended. Ken Swanton had to resign in June 2019 when he moved from Harvard.

The first year was spent investigating the requirements for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), including meetings with the state’s Architectural Access Board (MAAB) and the Town’s Building Inspector, and the various options that would be available to make the building ADA compliant. Of the several options considered, the Committee recommended to, and the Select Board endorsed, restoration of the original historic front entrance with a ramp paralleling the front of the building that would join the restored exterior stairs at the main floor of the Library. The existing side entrance would be removed. Pending completion of this option, the Committee recommended making the rear door accessible, provided a temporary variance was obtained from the MAAB waiving the need to correct the grade of the pathway to the rear door to conform to ADA standards. In addition, the Committee recommended retaining the services of a code compliance consultant to identify potential interior accessibility issues.

At the April 1, 2017 Annual Town Meeting \$20,000 was approved for design, engineering and cost estimating services to restore and make ADA compliant the historic front entrance. In addition, \$55,000 were approved for minimal upgrades to the rear door as the interim ADA-compliant entrance. Abacus Architects + Planners was retained and commenced work with the Committee in late April. Schematic drawings and a cost estimate were completed by the end of the summer. The November 2017 Special Town Meeting approved a total of \$472,000 to fund construction of “an ADA accessible front entrance and code compliance renovations, repairs, and improvements throughout the building” (\$50,000 from CPA Funds, \$39,000 being the unspent funds for the rear door, and \$383,000 to be financed through a borrowing). Because the building was being leased to a cultural non-profit organization, the Harvard Cultural Collaborative, the Town was able to apply to the Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund for funding this project. An application was submitted in January 2018 and a grant in the amount of \$192,000 was awarded in June.

With this project moving into the construction phase, the Select Board agreed to expand the Committee to include two additional members with construction and project management experience: Chris Cutler and Pete Jackson. In August the project went out to bid. Unfortunately, the bids came in significantly higher than the \$472,000 budgeted, with the lowest bidder, Rinaldi Inc., pushing the total project cost to \$672,000. At the October 2018 Special Town Meeting an additional \$200,000 was requested and approved. In late November, Rinaldi, Inc. took control of the site and Carl Sciple was retained by the Town as Clerk of the Works. It was expected the project would be completed in four months, but weather and other factors caused repeated delays in meeting the construction schedule. While the roof was not part of the project, it was apparent that the flat roof over the old south entry was leaking into the interior on both the first and basement floors. The Committee recommended and the Select Board agreed to fund a temporary fix to the roof, with the expectation the entire roof would be repaired or replaced within the next two to three years.

A Temporary Certificate of Occupancy was issued in May 2019, but as the front entry was still not serviceable, the Harvard Cultural Collaborative (dba Fivesparks) did not resume occupancy. (Among other items, the floor of the exterior vestibule needed to be tiled and the front door needed adjustment and a locking system needed to be installed.) Over the next few months as work focused on exterior landscaping and regrading of the site, Rinaldi focused on finishing the items on the “punch list” to the architects’ and Committee’s satisfaction. By late November, almost one year to the day from when Rinaldi took control of the site, the contract with Rinaldi was deemed complete and final invoices authorized for payment. Still to be completed, however, was installation of the card swipe locking system. The Selectmen, at the Committee’s request, had separated this task from Rinaldi’s contract and agreed to authorize up to \$5,000 in Rantoul Trust Funds for this work, should it be necessary. Jasonics Security Corporation completed installation of the card swipe system in December.

This project, unfortunately, took significantly longer than expected. However, with the historic front entrance restored and fully accessible, and the south-facing porch restored and enclosed with large windows, the Old Library has been returned to its earlier stateliness. And with its current tenant, Five Sparks, it again provides a venue for enriching the cultural life of the Town. While the Old Library Accessibility project has been completed, the Committee recognizes there are additional deferred maintenance issues to be addressed. The most urgent of these is to secure the exterior of the building in order to prevent further water infiltration, as proposed under Option 2 of the November 18, 2019 Gale Associates, which would include replacing the slate roof, replacing the gutter system and downspouts, cleaning the underground drainage system, repairing the masonry cornice, and repointing the mortar joints. Other tasks include replacement of the windows with more energy efficient windows, painting the exterior window sills and frames, and regular cleaning of the gutters. It is hoped that the hiring of a Town Facilities Manager will assure that these matters are addressed.

The success of this project was due in no small part to the commitment, skills and passion of the Committee – particularly Wendy Cote-Magan, who advocated for the historic integrity of the building, and Pete Jackson and Chris Cutler, the construction problem-solvers. The project did come in on budget, as well. Special thanks are also given to the Harvard Garden Club for its donation of funds for plantings and volunteers to install and care for the plantings.

Old Library Accessibility Committee:

Wendy Cote-Magan
Chris Cutler
Pete Jackson
Mark Mikitarian
Ken Swanton (resigned June 2019)
Lucy Wallace, Chair