



FARMINGTON COMMUNITY LIBRARY

September 21, 2017

Farmington Community Library Building Update

The Farmington Community Library Board of Trustees has unanimously decided to not renew the lease for the Chapters Café located at the Main Library on Twelve Mile Road. The decision was not made lightly nor without a great deal of consideration. The Board is aware that there are differences of opinion on this topic, as we have listened to numerous patrons who voiced their concerns at various public comment sessions. However, the Board is in agreement that it is in the best interest of the Library and its patrons that the Café be closed and the space repurposed.

The Library Board has consistently sought to improve the quality of service offered to patrons based on the Library's mission and strategic objectives. The Board is made up of community members appointed by the mayors of the municipalities that they represent, four representatives for the City of Farmington and four representatives for the City of Farmington Hills. Prior to each appointment, each candidate is vetted and approved by the respective City Council. Each Library Board member possesses years of professional experience, a full spectrum of academic credentials, and is fully engaged with the Farmington/Farmington Hills community. It is with this background and understanding of economic and demographic trends and our Library operations that the Library Board has unanimously approved the repurposing of the Café space.

The decision has been reached based on the changing library service model, as well as economic realities that have presented themselves in recent years. We have had a café since 2003, with the understanding that the need for a café would continually be evaluated. From the onset, the lease provided the Library with the right to terminate the lease at any time, provided the vendor was not merely replaced with another vendor. Over the years, there have been three different vendors, none of whom were able to produce the results the Library had hoped for. Therefore, when the most recent lease expired (November 2016), the Board revisited the café concept, and the decision was made to not renew the lease and to repurpose the space.

The café operations have never produced meaningful income to the Library, and in fact, the Library has subsidized its operations. The rent is below market for similar space in our community, and was based on a percentage of sales, so when sales declined (due to reduced hours, or other reasons), so did the rent. Utilities (heat, water, electricity, phone service) were provided at no additional charge.

Many area libraries installed cafés during the late 1990s – early 2000s, and most of them have discontinued their operation for a variety of reasons, including unfavorable economics, cost of providing space, better use of allocated space, and difficulty in maintaining quality goods and services that are supported by the consumer and thus, allow for a profit.

The lease for the café specified the business would be open at least 80% of the Library's operating hours, yet over time the hours of operation have reduced to the point that the café remains closed for a third of the time the Library is open. This means it is not available to serve our early morning patrons and staff who enter the Library at 9:00 AM, or those who come to study and use our facilities in the evening until the 9:00 PM closing time. Consequently, some of our prime space is closed to the public, dark and inaccessible to patrons for as much as four hours per day.

A lease is a business transaction and does not constitute an employer/employee relationship in perpetuity. The lease ended in November 2016, but was continued on a month-to-month basis until June 2017 when the library officially provided a termination of lease letter. A request was made by the proprietors to continue the lease, and the Library agreed to an extension until September 30, 2017, essentially giving the owners adequate time to make alternate arrangements. In addition, the Library waived all rent at that time.

After 14 years, it is once again time for the Main Library to undergo refurbishment and to look at spaces and services offered. Previous focus group findings indicated a need for repurposing space. Library staff fields requests each day for collaborative and community oriented areas; places where someone can Skype, take a phone call without disturbing another, casually converse with friends, take part in an interview, hold an informal book discussion group, etc. Providing this type of space is very consistent with the Library's mission and strategic objectives, and repurposing this area will help the Library meet the needs of our very diverse community.

Yes, the needs of the community are changing and the Library is changing with it. Hopefully, you have noticed the new carpeting and the fresh coat of paint. Future projects include having a dedicated teen area, where kids can have a spot of their own, and the addition of more study rooms for groups who need to collaborate on projects. We thank you for your patience as we continue to provide resources and services that make the best use of our facilities to benefit our patrons and communities.

Clark G. Doughty, President

Library Board of Trustees

