



Paper: Darien Times, The (CT)
Title: RTM approval now needed Finance board OK's library buy
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Two down, one to go. The Board of Finance approved, by a 6-0 vote with one abstention, spending \$4.125 million on the 1.9 acre Leroy Avenue property that includes the library building. Board member Peter Hovell abstained in last Thursday's vote because he is on the new library's building committee.

On April 9, the Board of Selectmen unanimously approved the purchase. A vote on the purchase will now go to the Representative Town Meeting, where it may be an agenda item of a special meeting on June 11.

The Planning & Zoning Commission also must approve that owning the property falls within the town's plan of development.

The money from the sale would go toward the library's capital campaign, which is looking to raise up to \$28 million. As of last month, it had \$21 million. The sale of the land would put the library within \$3 million.

[A guest commentary about the capital campaign by the Darien Library Board of Trustees president appears on page 5A]

Hovell told The Darien Times on Monday that he felt the board rushed into approving the purchase. "I asked what the meaning of the resolution was because we had no response from the library other than their original offering letter."

At one point during the meeting, the board had to go into executive session to rework the language of the resolution.

Because the RTM probably won't address the library purchase until June, Hovell questioned why the board had to approve it right now. He said he was OK having a sense of the meeting in favor of it, but didn't think another week or two would've made a difference.

"I've said over and over again that I'm in favor of the library, but I didn't feel the Board of Finance acted in a fiduciary sound manner or performed due diligence before approving the purchase."

"For the most part, everybody is on board and agrees that this is something that needed to get done," Craig Curtis, finance chairman, told The Darien Times on Tuesday.

Curtis also said some board members were concerned with the due process that the board undertook in approving the library purchase, but he sees that as an asset to the board.

"Some have a different perspective and that brings a different facet to the argument," he said. "So that helps make a more comprehensive decision, and I encourage that."

Should the purchase go through, the town will have considerable time to come up with a plan for the site because the library will not open at its new location on the Post Road until fall 2008. The purchase opens the door for more affordable housing downtown. The town's affordable housing hovers around 3 percent, well below the statemandated 10 percent.

"This is an extraordinary opportunity for the town," First Selectman Evonne Klein told The Darien Times last Tuesday. "The board has identified that property as a place to build affordable housing. We've been engaged with nonprofit and for-profit developers so we can get an idea of the process to build affordable housing. We are looking forward to working on these plans over the next two years."

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