

## Library director urges larger facility for La Plata

By Paul Lagasse [plagasse@somdnews.com](mailto:plagasse@somdnews.com) Mar 30, 2018

The Charles County Board of Commissioners assured county public library executive director Janet Salazar on Tuesday that the new La Plata Library will be larger than the existing facility following a study that calls for a new building that is at least twice the size of the current one.

Commissioner Ken Robinson (D) even went so far as to say that he did not anticipate the new library would be smaller than the system's newest branch, Waldorf West.

The 2019 fiscal year capital improvement budget, which is being finalized, specifies the construction of a new 13,000-square-foot library to replace the current building, which was built just over 50 years ago.

At that size, the new building would be only 111 square feet larger than the existing building, which is generally considered as being inadequate for the needs of library users.

However, at a town hall meeting in December, the commissioners assured concerned residents that the 13,000-square-foot calculation was simply a "placeholder" to ensure that the library made it into the list of funded projects, and that additional funding would be sought through grants and other sources.

The commissioners reiterated that message to Salazar during Tuesday's presentation.

Salazar presented the results of a study of current and projected needs conducted by the Ohio-based consulting firm OrangeBoy. The study found that because of its central location the La Plata branch library has the widest-reaching service area of the county's four branches, serving nearly a third of the county's population. The La Plata library logged over 568,000 visits during the 2017 fiscal year, an increase of almost 20 percent over the previous year.

"La Plata's area of dominant influence is quite large," Salazar said.

An average of 31,000 people attend programs at the library each year, Salazar said.

Salazar said that the study recommended that the new library's design should include sufficient public space for computer labs, rooms for technology related tutoring and programming, and dedicated spaces for children and teens including study rooms.

The study also recommended that the new library should be designed to handle an anticipated population growth of 5 percent over the next five years.

To meet these needs as well as to continue serving as the county library system's administrative hub, the study concluded that the minimum size of any new library should be 26,000 square feet, or double the existing building.

Salazar noted that the size of Waldorf West is 30,000 square feet.

To date, four sites have been studied for the new library.

The Coca-Cola Vending Building on E. Charles Street is centrally located and is close to transit stops, and the existing building has the same square footage as the Waldorf West branch. However, available parking is inadequate and the site would have to be purchased, which would incur additional expense.

A 79,000-square-foot county-owned lot at Baltimore and E. Charles streets is also convenient to downtown La Plata and offers the possibility of multiple entrances and exits to ease traffic flow, but lacks nearby pedestrian and bicycle crossings.



The study ruled out the other two sites, which were the overflow parking lot at the Charles County Government complex and a small lot at the corner of Queen Anne Street and St. Mary's Avenue.

The county has already allocated \$2.6 million to the relocation project and calls for spending an additional \$1.7 million over the next five years of the capital improvement program budget that it would raise through bonds.

The county's capital improvement program budget provides a rolling five-year budget projection for infrastructure projects.

Salazar said the library is also applying for a grant that could help pay for some of the building costs, and also plans to launch a capital campaign to raise funds for the new building.

"When we build the new La Plata area library, it's not going to be smaller than Waldorf West, and anything in the capital improvement plan that may be listed as 13 [thousand square feet] is just a placeholder," Robinson told Salazar when she finished presenting the results of the usage and needs study.

"When we get to the point of committing to a location in the La Plata area, at that point it will become more realistic," Robinson said.

In the meantime, county administrator Michael Mallinoff will begin working with the library system to turn the study's results and recommendations into requirements that the county can budget and plan for.

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