

Fac. Lib Bldg  
Comm

MINUTES  
of the

Library Building Committee (Executive) meeting with the Faculty Library Planning Committee, the Faculty Educational Policies Committee, the Student Library Planning Committee and representatives of the Executive Committee and the Student Educational Policies Committee

The joint meeting of these committees was held in Barn 1 on Wednesday, September 18, 1957, at 4:15 p.m.

Mr. Fels opened the meeting. He outlined the progress that had so far been made towards planning a new Library Building. He said that when the College received a notice of a bequest which would cover the cost of building a library, administrative machinery was set up for planning a new building. This includes committees of the Board of Trustees and a Committee of the Faculty. Out of discussions with these groups and the Architects came suggestions for two sites, and although these are not the only possible sites the thought of the different groups seemed to converge on them. One is the East Parking Lot site, and the other is the Cricket Hill site. The question of how noisy the sites would be had been raised and it was impossible to answer this in the summer when a meeting was held with the architects and the Trustee Library Building Committee, as there was little or no traffic at that time. It was also impossible in the summer for the faculty to be present, or the students, to give their opinions. Mr. Fels had therefore arranged this meeting so that faculty, students and architects could talk together. He had asked the architects to confine themselves as far as possible to the problem of site selection. No vote was to be taken at this meeting but it was hoped that after the meeting students and faculty would be in a better position to make a strong recommendation to the Trustees as to the best site.

Mr. Fels then introduced Mr. Day, representing Pietro Belluschi - Carl Koch and Associates, who in turn introduced his associates.

Mr. Day described his first visit to the campus with Dean Belluschi when they wandered around and selected two possible sites. They had been asked to keep in mind that sometime Bennington would also have a theatre-arts building, and in selection of the site for a library they were to pick a tentative site for future building of this theatre. They had to be careful therefore not to snatch the only available theatre site for the library. Particularly taken with the charm of the various courts, into which the campus seemed to be divided round the Student Houses and the Barn area, they felt that this was a small formal campus, dominated by the large Commons building. Into this campus inherited buildings such as the Barn had been fitted, but Jennings Hall was too far away to be drawn into close relation with the existing campus. They felt the Library should be intimately related to the Barn, the Commons and the Student Houses.

A theatre would need much space for parking and could be placed on the land beyond the West Parking Lot where there is plenty of space. Considering all these factors Dean Belluschi and Mr. Day had chosen the East Parking Lot as the best site for the new Library.

Cricket Hill they felt was almost, but not quite, as good from the view of relationship to the other main buildings, but it lacked aesthetic relationship to the campus. This site would also be slightly poorer from a functional point of view. They then tried plans on both sites and again felt that the East Parking Lot was best. After the summer meeting with the Trustee Library Building Committee, the architects explored a slightly different plan for the Cricket Hill site and have since worked on details for this, bearing in mind the East Parking Lot site the whole time.

Since then Dean Belluschi has had time to think about both sites and Mr. Day then read part of a letter from Dean Belluschi in which he said that he thought the plans drawn up for the Library were admirable and that now a meeting should certainly take place with the sole purpose of selecting a site. He added "I have been thinking a great deal and unhurriedly about the arguments regarding the merits of the two sites and have come to the conclusion that the East Parking Lot is better altogether from the point of view of scale, texture of plan, intimacy of environment and visual relationship. If we could build first on both sites before choosing, this would certainly be self-evident."

Mr. Walker of Hideo Sasaki and Associates, site planners and landscape architects, then gave the opinions of his firm. He said there were two points to make, but first he gave some background for those who were not at the previous meeting. After Dean Belluschi and Mr. Day had chosen their sites they called in Mr. Sasaki but did not tell him which sites they favoured. After walking round the campus Mr. Sasaki chose the East Parking Lot as the most favourable site. The two things he was looking for were a functional relationship to the rest of the campus and a symbolic relationship, i.e. the Library must be easily accessible because it is the center of the campus. It should therefore be equidistant from the student houses and lecture rooms. The campus is small scale and intimate, the character of the planning is in a series of courts. One is conscious of small areas tied together by paths. The formality of the campus is caused by close grouping. The Library could be built on either site but the East Parking Lot site was preferable.

Mr. Peterson of Carl Koch and Associates then spoke of more detailed aspects of the plans. He referred to the preliminary program for the planning of the new Library building which gave such things as required space allocation, etc. No complete or definite conclusions had yet been reached about this but the architects had been thinking in generalities, as for instance how much space would

this library cover. It would have to be one in which all the facilities were on one floor. In a small college there was the problem of running a fairly sizeable library, which this would be. If it was built entirely on one level it would cover a tremendous amount of space. This was realised when the summer meeting was held and the area was paced out. He said that since then he had been trying to work with Miss Hopkins on designing less of a mass and something more in relation to the other buildings on the campus. One does not notice the mass of the present buildings and it would be a pity to put up a new building that looked massive. Therefore it was decided to have a two-level building (split-level having been turned down). The most important elements would be on one floor and the building should be in keeping with the informal scale of the entire college. Details of planning were not necessary here.

On the two sites which the architects prefer there are different problems, created by the slope of the land. The advantage of the East Parking Lot is that the building can be arranged conveniently from this point of view and one would not be conscious of the large bulk of it, it would be more informal.

On the Cricket Hill site the situation is difficult because of the relationship with the Barn. One is conscious of the falling off of the land and one would be more conscious of the size of the building for this reason. Also it would be necessary to bring the service entrance to the front of the building on the Cricket Hill site, which would not be as attractive as having it at the back. The latter arrangement would be possible on the East Parking Lot site. Here Mr. Peterson raised the question of levels in the building and said that another advantage of the East Parking Lot would be the possibility of entering from the Barn so that it was only necessary to go down half a level. When entering from the Student Houses, it would be necessary to climb only half a level to reach the main floor. In the Cricket Hill building, one would enter at the main level, but would then have to descend a full level to reach the other floor. There followed a discussion of the levels and of the amount of climbing involved. While in the East Parking Lot site these entering from the student houses would have to go up, those entering from the side nearest the Barn would go down.

Mrs. Foster asked about the question of accoustics and Mr. Peterson read part of a letter from a firm of consulting accoustical engineers, in which they advised that if the Library was fully air-conditioned with quarter-inch plate glass in all the windows no noise from outside would be heard, even on a busy city street. If there were to be open windows opposite the dormitory windows then noise might be expected but as this was not the case it presented no problem. Mr. Peterson also stressed the fact that there would be a wall between the student houses and the library and that no windows would directly overlook the student houses. He further said that the engineers would like to point out that a certain amount of noise would be desirable for the individual student. If a library was too quiet they said, interior noises, conversations, the rustling of pages, etc. became magnified and caused disturbance. They therefore recommended a reasonable amount of background noise (e.g. ventilators, air conditioners, etc.).

Questions were then asked and were answered variously by the three architects.

Mr. Feeley asked why the architects objected to the North Parking Lot area - it is the one site that bears relation to the music and recreation block and there would be an advantage in having traffic move out towards Jennings. This question was also raised by Helaine Feinstein who said that the general feeling among the students was that Jennings was a long way out and it would be a good thing if a building could be put up to bridge the gap. Jenny Polson said she thought the theatre would be a better building than the Library to pull the Barn and Jennings together. Jane Vosburgh did not like the North Parking Lot site because it would have all the noise of incoming and outgoing traffic quite close to it.

Mr. Day replied that it would be easy to build on the North Parking Lot, but he felt that the Commons formed an obstacle between this area and the student houses. There was also the problem of lack of relationship between the Barn, the Commons and this site. Mr. Peterson later remarked that one could not really get any relationship simply by putting one building between the two areas of Commons and Jennings. There is a disadvantage, he said, in "suburban sprawl" and it would be a pity not to preserve the rolling fields. What would a future Bennington College look like if one went off now in a different direction from the general pattern? It would change the whole character if you started dotting isolated buildings about.

Mr. Nowak pointed out that only one section of the campus had been shown on the plans and Mrs. Foster pointed out that the campus had been truncated by excluding the Jennings area.

Mr. Day said the architects knew there were other places, but the area shown was where everyone started from, that is, the center of the campus.

Mr. Wilcos raised two points - 1. That the architects have assumed that we want an intimate relationship, but that there was the question as to whether we ought to huddle together on top of the hill. And 2. that the buildings were related when seen on the plan, but one did not feel conscious of this when walking. He said that he could not see the Commons Building as a barrier since it was not difficult to walk around it, and that he did not see why it was necessary to preserve a plan that looked good from the air if one did not feel the benefit of this symmetry when one was walking between the buildings.

Mr. Day replied that the architects liked what was already here and would like to extend it. They realised there was a lot of land and felt that it was good for the campus to remain close together, surrounded by big fields.

Mr. Walker added to this that at Bennington there was a unity of theme which many colleges did not have and that this was too precious to spoil or lose.

Mr. Day said that if the student houses were to be expanded a problem would have to be faced. One should not think, however, in the sense of a bulls-eye or anything absolutely symmetrical, but one should feel the relationship of areas. There should be an ordered advancement of existing conditions not any startling change in policy.

Carole Glover remarked that students did not want the Library near the student houses, because when students went to the Library they wanted to get away from the campus.

Mr. Day said perhaps the thinking of the architects had been coloured by the municipal libraries they had designed, where the chief aim was to have the building accessible to everyone. He felt it should be the meeting ground for all people.

Mr. Hyman said that to the working teacher Cricket Hill was nearer the Barn and therefore preferable. That it is further from the student houses is to the teacher a merit not a disadvantage since the teacher sees the college centered round the lecture rooms. Cricket Hill also had a view of Jennings Hall.

Miss Schlabach later said that in ten minute intervals between classes it was convenient for teachers and students to go into the Library and this would not be possible if it was not easily accessible from the Barn.

Jenny Polson said that on the whole she preferred the East Parking Lot site to the suggested North Parking Lot or anything further away, because when one had walked to Jennings Hall several times during the day it was a good thing to have the Library near to the student houses.

Miss Schlabach asked whether one site would be more expensive than another, as she felt sure none of the faculty would wish to sacrifice a good interior working area for the sake of the site.

Mr. Walker replied that both sites had about equal expenses, though of a different nature and he did not think that this question should colour opinion on site selection as the difference in cost was not great.

Miss Hopkins asked whether either site allowed room for expansion.

Mr. Peterson replied that Cricket Hill could be expanded indefinitely and that on either site 100 per cent expansion would be possible and a fifty per cent expansion would be easy.

Abby Fink asked whether the architects were committed to a two-level building and Mr. Peterson replied that they were not committed to anything until the site was selected.

The meeting then moved outside and the two sites were examined as was also the North Parking Lot. After further discussion the meeting was adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

SIGNED JANET EASON  
Secretary.