



## Forest Home Library

### Zoning, Neighborhood & Development Meeting

December 8<sup>th</sup> 2020

Thank you Eric. I first want to start by saying in addition to speaking as part of Eric & Kelsey's team as a professional, I'm also speaking today as a resident and citizen of the city of Milwaukee. I live at 341 E Deer Place, in Bay View, the 14<sup>th</sup> District, which is represented by Alderwoman Demitriavic, and also the neighboring district to the Forest Home Library.

#### Slide 1

At ARG we strive for our work to enhance and strengthen historic buildings and spaces for adaptive use. This reflects our belief that historic places offer **communities** a connection to the past in a rapidly changing world. We apply our broad expertise to researching and understanding the social, cultural, and historic value of structures, and then engage our experience in design, preservation, conservation, and sustainability to create places with historic meaning adapted to modern needs.

ARG has worked on a several historically significant Modern buildings, from the iconic Mid-century modern Eames House, to the Mission 66 Visitor's Center at Furnace Creek in Death Valley National Park, to the National Register eligible, Mid-Century Modern Altadena Main Library building. We at ARG believe these buildings encompass our country's Modern Architecture Legacy, which in turn is OUR legacy to preserve for future generations.

#### Slide 2

The Forest Home Library is not unlike these other Modern Historic buildings that we have worked on. Forest Home Library is an amazing and exemplary example of Mid-Century Modern Architecture, not only locally significant, but also significant at a National level. These beautiful images portray an impressive and important building because of it's architectural design.

#### Slide 3

However, I find this image to be more defining of the building, and what really makes this building special; this building was designed for the community. Forest Home Library provided a safe place for children, and people of all ages, to learn, grow and find community.

Books can be shelved in any old building, but the city and the architects held this library to a higher standard, and made sure the Forest Home Library would be a building worth gathering in.

#### **Slide 4**

The floor plan of this building is beautifully simple. There is a central entry axis, with the main entry from Forest Home Avenue on one end, and the entry from the parking lot on the other end. On the East side of the axis is the private, utilitarian wing of the building. This wing provides more privacy with solid walls, and only clerestory windows. On the West side of the entry axis is the Public open plan wing of the building. A uniform grid pattern of columns and beams, as well as uniform window and precast concrete bays define the space, and provide a simple layout with maximum flexibility.

Because of its beautifully simple floor plan, the Forest Home Library has the capability of being adaptively reused into one of many different uses. We have developed a handful of programming studies that illustrate what these potential changes in use may look like.

#### **Slide 5**

This first option transforms the Library into an Arts & Artisans Marketplace. The uniform bays defined by the simple grid pattern would be partitioned off to create eight, small 400 square foot studio spaces for local artists. At the North end of the building, a larger 1100 square foot multi-activity room would provide space for art classes, after school activities and other community programs. The South end of the building would house an anchor Café Tenant, which with a few sensitive modifications to the window wall, could open up to the trellis space, activating the front of the building along Forest Home Avenue. Restrooms, storage and equipment rooms would be located in the private wing of the building, as well as a potential gallery space for the artists in residence to display their work. Lastly, generous circulation space allow for gallery opening and “First Friday” type of events.

#### **Slide 6**

We believe this option would be successful, in part because there are already a few great successful examples of creative community marketplaces in Milwaukee, such as the Sherman Phoenix and the Crossroads Collective. Also, the success of events such as the Maker’s Market and Gallery Night MKE show promise in how an art’s marketplace like this

could generate excitement and positive activity in the community. Lastly, the proximity to the nearby schools can help encourage arts awareness and education to the youth in the community.

### **Slide 7**

The second use option looks at transforming the Library into a Community Event Venue. The open layout of the building lends itself well to being an event venue where large gatherings can take place in one room, whether a wedding, quinceanera, graduation or anniversary party. When needed, temporary partitions could also be used to split the large space up, making smaller gather spaces for community meetings, classes or training events.

At the south end of the building, a restaurant would occupy about a third of the space as the anchor tenant who would be open daily, but also provide the catering service to support the events venue. The east wing of the building would house the support, storage, restrooms and utility spaces for the building.

### **Slide 8**

This option would provide a venue for community members to rent and use for celebrations and gatherings, and the restaurant would provide an active presence on Forest Home Avenue by utilizing the outdoor trellis space during the warmer months.

### **Slide 9**

The third use option looks at turning the Library into an Education and Training Center for the community. The North and South ends of the building would be partitioned into 2300 sf multi-activity rooms for training and education activities, such as after school STEM education events, or Architecture, Construction and Engineering mentoring. Additionally, Three roughly 1,000 square foot rooms, with limited windows, would be created to house training and education rooms geared toward digital and computer literacy. These rooms would have computers, but also modern digital equipment, such as laser cutters, laser scanners and 3D printers. This option would also include about 4,400 square feet of flexible lounge space which would provide seating nodes for gatherings of small groups, whether after school for students or during the day for seniors within the community.

### **Slide 10**

Similar to the branch library concept, this model would create a branch education system, bringing higher-level education and training into a diverse, underserved community, and breaking the norms of requiring people to travel to campuses that can be hard to reach and expensive to get to. Important partnerships with non-profits organizations, universities, and training and mentorship programs would make the vision for this use option possible.

### **Slide 11**

The fourth, but not last possible option, looks at building a new multi-family residential building in the open parking lot area of the site. Preserving parking at the ground level, this new structure would house affordable housing on the second and third levels of the building. The new development at the back of the site, would allow the developer to use historic tax credits to restore the library for use as a community center, and as in the previous options, an anchor Café tenant could occupy the southern portion of the building and trellis space.

### **Slide 12**

The community center could consist of flexible spaces for hosting multiple types of activities, such as art classes, yoga and dance classes, and after school group activities. Multi-use meeting rooms would provide gathering spaces for community organizations or teaching rooms for training workshops. Lastly, flexible lounge space with nodes of seating would allow for gatherings of small groups, from students to seniors.

### **Slide 13**

It is also worth noting, that although we are showing a new multi-family residential addition only in the fourth option, we believe a new addition in the parking lot area is viable for all of these options, especially if it is a way to make the project financially feasible and desirable to a potential developer. A new building on the site, in this footprint, would have approximately 17,000 square feet in new building area, which could also be used for a variety of uses, including residential, office space, or even a clinic.

### **Slide 14**

Although each of these options may seem like a dream, we believe that each is economically feasible, and could be financially successful and profitable to the city. One critical way for this to be possible, is through Federal and State Historic Tax Credits. There have been numerous economic studies done which illustrate the economic success Historic Tax Credits have not only for federal and state governments, but also for local governments. In 2019 alone, \$6.4 billion dollars were spent in the investment of rehabilitating our country's

historic buildings, and notably 74% of those projects occurred in economically distressed areas. I think that goes to show that Historic Tax Credits are a valuable tool to help incentivize important development and revitalization in communities that need it most.

**Slide 15**

I will end today with this quote by Jane Jacobs,

“While people possess a community, they usually understand that they can’t afford to lose it, but after it is lost, gradually even the memory of what was lost is lost.”

I think the former Forest Home Library represents more than just a building, it was a place of gathering, and a place of community. I hope it will not be lost.