

BRIDGEPORT LIBRARY

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Bridgeport Public Library acquires former Charles Smith Center for renovated Newfield Branch Library

Bridgeport, CT - July 17, 2015

The Board of Directors of the Bridgeport Public Library and Reading Room has purchased, along with other parcels, the former Newfield Library building at 755 Central Avenue that more recently housed the Charles D. Smith Foundation and Educational Center. The property had served as the Newfield Branch until 1991, when City financial difficulties prevented capital repairs and other needed maintenance. The City Council sold the library building to Charles D. Smith, Jr. to use it as a community center that later ceased operations.

Library Board Treasurer Tom Errichetti stated: "The Library Board, based upon the recently completed Facilities Plan, has proactively reacted to the plan to provide facilities as promised during the referendum initiative. We are excited as we begin to provide improved facilities to the East End and anticipate improved facilities to the East Side." Throughout an extensive search for a suitable site to relocate the current leased facility, the Library Board has been consulting with members of the community. Implementation of the *Library Master Plan* to restore and improve facilities for Library services in the City has begun with this acquisition as a first step in that process. The Library Board will collaborate with the community about expansion of the original structure, with its iconic fireplaces, high vaulted 18' ceiling and tall windows to recreate the historic Newfield Library, with a new state of the art structure on an adjacent parcel to provide approximately 10,000 square feet of space for the library collection, computer tech center, innovation resources and community meeting for the East End community.

The Library Board has been working with Mayor Bill Finch and the City Administration to improve facilities for the essential services the Library provides Bridgeport's residents. As Library Board Director Rosalina Roman Christy noted, "The constituents of the East End and East Side deserve to have a library in their neighborhood that meets the residents' needs. The Library Board has worked diligently to meet that need." Public Libraries have proven to be catalysts, not only for community stability and revitalization, but for economic development as well. The acquisition of these parcels will be the anchor for major improvements to the entire block that fronts Stratford Avenue. More importantly, with these improvements, the Library will fulfill its role as the neighborhood center for life-long learning, enrichment and enjoyment for all ages. "The libraries in Bridgeport serve as that trusted, 'Third Place', away from home and work, where we can gather with free and open access to information, resources and services to explore ideas and interests and engage in a vibrant civic life. This renovated space will be the new focal point of those activities in the East End – in the words of the Library Strategic Plan: 'Building Community, Helping People, Changing Lives'", said Library Board President Jim O'Donnell. As Judge William Holden, who serves as Chairperson of the Library Board's Building Committee, added: "We have been working diligently to realize this dream and I am happy to say, 'It is happening in my lifetime!'"

- For more information, contact Jim O'Donnell at (203) 767-6488.

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