



Drayton Valley library left in limbo

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The Drayton Valley library needs more space, ideally in a new facility, and that need is not going to go away any time soon.

That was the message from library board chair Lyndara Cowper Smith last week as she looked to clear up what she described as misunderstandings caused by insufficient information about the library's search for a new home.

The library is currently housed in the same building as the Drayton Valley town office and the fire hall. It's been known for many years that both the Town and the fire department need additional space for their operations and it's long been understood that relocating the library is the

organizations.

The issue came to the fore last year when the owners of the old Sears building downtown offered it as a potential new home for the library at a discounted price in exchange for naming rights to the facility. Shortly afterwards a second option, the old United Church, was also put forward.

Meanwhile, as a cost cutting measure, the library board opted to permanently close the Rotary Children's Library. The idea was to combine both the libraries into a single space which would be more convenient for users and also mean reduced operational costs across the board. That can't be done in the current location where there's not enough room to house the collections from both libraries, let alone provide any additional services or programming.

The library board evaluated both

down heavily in favour of the Sears building.

"Is it feasible? Is it cost-effective? Is it a nice space? We had about 15 criteria," says Cowper-Smith. "We're trying to offer the community the best service possible."

While the former church had been offered to Brazeau County at the nominal price of one dollar, the cost of necessary renovations was estimated to be close to \$500,000. The Sears building could either be bought or leased, with the potential purchase price determined after an appraisal carried out by an appraiser chosen by the buyer. There was also the possibility of renting out unneeded space in that building to local businesses including the likes of an internet cafe.

"Potentially it would meet all the needs of the library for 30 years,"

building that is ours and is bringing in revenue. It looked like a good deal for the Town that actually generated net income. It's potentially \$40,000 a year revenue positive. To me that's huge."

Locating the library in the heart of downtown also had the potential to help revitalize an often overlooked part of the community.

However, things have now ground to a halt. The library board is not in a position to purchase or lease a building itself and is reliant on the support of one or both of the local municipalities. Cowper-Smith says the impasse has led to considerable frustration for board members, who are volunteers and who had done everything they could to find a solution that was a win for the library, for its patrons and for the municipalities and their taxpayers.

"We sat with bated breath, but

to discuss it until after the next election," she says.

"We're not the ones who initiated this. We've spent two years on this and we've kept council appraised ... If there's a whole bunch of new people in there (after the election) we're just going to have to start again."

Meanwhile the library has continued to see robust usership among residents of both Drayton Valley and Brazeau County in spite of forced closure during the pandemic. The library budget has been reduced by 20 percent this year at the request of the Town and the County. With its future location still uncertain, parts of the collection from the Rotary library have been added to the main branch, but, due to a lack of room, the remainder has been placed in storage.