

Copper Queen library needs \$1.1 million for needed renovations

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Bisbee's Copper Queen Library will be using funds provided through a building assessment grant from the State Historic Preservation Office of Arizona for various repairs. One of the items to be addressed will be adding "invisible balcony rails" along the existing rails.

BISBEE — Bisbee's historic Copper Queen Library has been a vital resource to the community for 114 years and for a building of its age, it is in remarkable, sound condition, though there are a number of things that need to be done.

During the July 20 meeting of the Mayor and City Council, Corky Poster, with Poster, Mirto and McDonald Architecture Planning and Preservation, provided with an overview of the two day study performed on the historic building.

The firm was selected to go through the three story building which houses the library and the Old Bisbee Post Office and conduct a structural and code assessment.

“Our first impression was we rarely see buildings of this quality that haven't been ruined over time by inappropriate changes, Poster said. “We want to talk about enhancing a building that is really in original mint condition, by and large.

“Both its exterior and interior design and materials have survived remarkably intact since its original construction and forms an important visual and institutional anchor in Bisbee's downtown core. It's a spectacular building. You don't see many building this old in this good of shape.”

The study team, funded in part through the Arizona Historic Preservation Office, looked at the building's history, site issues, architectural and accessibility issues and the structural, mechanical, plumbing and electrical conditions.

The south facing exterior wall that faces Commerce Street is out of character with the rest of the building, Poster said. It has some wear and tear due to a repair of the back wall. It also has a haphazard conglomeration of electrical wiring, gas pipes and drainpipes from the upper stories and the roof.

Two downspouts are broken which need significant repair so the storm water goes into the drainage channel underneath Commerce Street. One of the broken downspouts sits close to an electrical box creating a hazard.

“That probably needs repair immediately,” he noted.

The small basement area is also a problem in flood events. He suggested the area be cleaned up.

As for handicapped accessibility, he said there are problems on the second and third floor. Access to the verandas has a few inches of drop from the library floor which need to be resolved. Though the second floor restroom is accessible, the third floor is not.

He commented on the excellent condition of the doors and windows and suggested the hardwood flooring be sanded and stained.

While the interior of the two stories of the library have retained most of its historical nature, the lighting fixtures should be replaced with new LED lights that point upward to light the ceiling allowing it to be the illuminator. Poster suggested replacing all the more modern fluorescent lighting with a more historical look.

The most important upgrade needed as quickly as possible are the railings along the stairs inside the library and the balcony which are lower than the current building code requires, he said.

There are possible additions to the railings to meet the height requirement and still retain the historical look.

“The railings along the verandas are dangerous,” he continued. “In some places it is only 29 inches to 30 inches off the ground. And the space between the railings are too large. Code requires it to be 42 inches from the ground. The spacing between the rails must be just four inches wide, so that children cannot get their heads through it. You shouldn’t allow people out there,” Poster said.

He also pointed a possible danger to people in wheelchairs accessing the veranda as there is slight step down from the second and third library floors which needed to be remedied.

They also found cracks in the concrete on the verandas which could allow water to penetrate through the slabs if not repaired.

The railings going up to the third floor are also dangerously low and need to be raised to meet code, he continued. They are about 30 inches of the ground and need to be 42 inches to meet code.

The HVAC system is a serious problem, and not just for the comfort of staff, volunteers and patrons. The use of evaporative coolers adds humidity to the interior and could result in damage to the books during the monsoon and other rain events, he said.

“For libraries, it’s the worst solution,” he added. “It really needs to be replaced. We have highly efficient air conditioning systems now. We would strongly recommend the replacement of this cooler system.”

The ground floor which houses the post office is a \$182,000 issue as “there is nothing original left of the interior, and, it’s in very poor condition,” he told the council. “You have little control on what they do inside and you might not want to spend a lot of public money on improvements. The bathroom there is barely accessible for ambulatory folks. And, that’s a violation of federal law.”

To accomplish all the issues Poster pointed out, would cost over \$1.1 million, he stated.

City Manager Steve Pauken said he went through the full report prepared on the library building “with particular interest on some of the things we may or may not be able to use our American Rescue Act funding.”

He voiced concerns about HVAC installation, because of the load it would create on the roof and the city would have to upgrade the electrical system to get power to the new system. He also suggested getting the structure checked to see if there were any unseen problems to the building’s structural integrity and wanted his concerns noted.

Poster said Pauken made a good point, “but from our perspective, all of the structural issues that were identified are surface issues. Even though we can’t see all of the bones of the building, any problems with those bones would telegraph into the building itself. There are no settlement cracks, no roof sagging, no telltale signs of structural problems. We saw none of those hints of problems at all.”

Macoviak said, “We’re proud of our building, and I think that if we can put some effort into keeping it up and running, so it will last another 100 years, I think is a great investment for Bisbee.”

Mayor Ken Budge and Councilmembers Lou Pawlik, Frank David, Joni Giacomino and Anna Cline did not discuss from where the money to enact the repairs and upgrades would come.

In an interview with the Herald/Review, Macoviak said he and staff would be searching for grant opportunities for historical buildings. The State Historic Preservation Office may end up with some funds to be used for grants this year.

Funds were cut when the economy took a hit, but he thinks some funding will be restored and there could be some grant money available.

“The average age of libraries in the country is 40 years. Ours is over 100 years old,” he said. “I think that gives us some prestige in looking for grants.”

He was also optimistic about a bill being floated at the federal level called the Build America’s Library Act, supported by the American Libraries Association, which if passed could bring \$5 billion to libraries across the country. Arizona is expected to receive around \$99 million of that money.

“I talked with Sen. Mark Kelley’s staff about it and asked for support,” he added. “The Arizona Library Association is also asking for his support.”

This money would go to projects just like the \$1.1 million needed for the Copper Queen Library, he said.

“People should call their senators and representatives and ask for their support to help our library and all those across the country,” he said.

Cost for needed repairs, upgrades to Copper Queen Library building priority list

Outdoor verandas, railings: \$65,000

Interior stair railings, safety improvements: \$55,000

ADA access to veranda: \$16,000

Roof, downspouts improvements: \$55,000

New HVAC for library: \$135,000

New electrical, lighting for library: \$191,500

All other interior, exterior improvements: \$407,000

Post Office repairs, improvement: \$182,000

Total: \$1,106,500



A deteriorating downspout lies precariously next to the library's electrical panel box in the back of the 114-year-old historic structure.

Mark Levy / Herald/Review



Cosmetic cracks and chipping around the facility are in need of repair.

Mark Levy / Herald/Review



The library's balcony needs ADA approved ramps as well as new railing.

Mark Levy / Herald/Review



The Copper Queen Library's inside main stairway is in need of renovations to the steps and railing.

Mark Levy / Herald/Review