

A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES,

SKOKIE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Motion by Selma Petty, seconded by Ethel Griffin, that the following statement be directed to the President and Trustees of the Village Board.

It is with dismay that the Library Board has discovered that various municipal planning departments have adopted a plan for the extension of Lincoln Avenue which would, in effect, unilaterally abrogate the written contract and long-established understanding between the Village and the Library Board providing for the cooperative development of park and library facilities on the property between the Library and Village Hall.

With the greatest sense of urgency we hope that the Village Board will quickly make clear that it still firmly supports the concept of a downtown civic-cultural center. This reaffirmation of the cordial and mutually cooperative spirit which has always typified the relationship between our two boards will make it possible to proceed without delay to act upon the recent Citizens Committee study calling for expansion of the present Library building. We fear that the proposed "expressway-type" extension of Lincoln Avenue through the property in question to link up with Laramie and Madison Streets would not only violate our contract and destroy the civic-cultural center concept, but might create problems that would seriously jeopardize both our expansion program and the main Library.

In order that everyone concerned may understand what is at stake, we would like to review briefly the history of the Library Board's cooperative efforts with the Village Board.

I. Origin of the Civic-Cultural Center Concept.

The present Village-Library plan for the Oakton Street property was conceived by the Library Board at the time the present Library was built. The Board at that time envisioned eventually acquiring the property east of the building site. At the very least, parking could be improved by attractively landscaping the portion along Oakton Street and paving the back section of the land. And in the event building expansion should be required, the entire orientation of the building, down to placement of the boilers and other mechanical equipment in the basement was designed to facilitate an eastward extension of the building.

Eventually, as it became clear that building expansion was going to be necessary, this Board's discussion got down to specific plans and approaches. It was at this point, early in 1963, that representatives of the Village, well aware of our interest in the property, came to us to point out that our coveted building site was threatened by a proposed apartment project. We were told the Village also wanted as much of the land as it could get for park development, but that it would, of course, give the Library's expansion first priority.

Out of the ensuing discussions arose the dream of a civic-cultural center developed cooperatively by the Village and the Library. It would be the most significant of many joint efforts between the Village Board and the Library Board and a major contribution to the community. The Library would build its addition and the Village would develop the remaining area as a park. We could solve the Library's parking problems by a parking area and roadway connecting our present limited space with the Village Hall parking lot. Pleasant walkways through the park would also make it convenient for Library patrons to use this area. Since our busiest times are evenings and Saturdays when the Village lot is largely vacant, the result

would be an economical merging of facilities as well as a convenience to the public.

There were problems, however. Without an expansion plan approved through a referendum, for which there wasn't time, the Library Board could not be certain of the type of facility or the exact land area required. The Village, on the other hand, had no funds to do anything, even with a hoped-for federal open space grant. The solution was that the Library would advance to the Village some \$90,000 out of its reserve fund for sites and buildings with which the Village could acquire all of the land in question, a portion of it being covered by a federal grant. The Village in turn agreed that it would convey to the Library title to whatever portion of the land we might later need up to approximately a 125 foot frontage (lots 8 and 9). Recognizing the need for both bodies to operate openly and with proper discretion in consideration of the public funds involved, a written contract was entered into in good faith by both parties to prevent any future misunderstanding or confusion.

II. At What Cost Traffic Control?

With this background, when discreet inquiries were made some time later by employees of the Village concerning an extension of Lincoln Avenue, our Librarian felt that it was enough to explain the Library's needs and point out our agreement with the Village. It was, therefore, something of a shock to discover that when members of the Citizens Committee visited Village Hall they were presented the idea of the street extension as though it were an accomplished fact agreeable to everyone concerned.

We are aware of the pressing need for traffic control solutions; however, the type of community we hope to plan cannot be realized by subordinating all other values to a preoccupation with traffic control. We know that building a new road often only attracts more traffic and leads to new -- and perhaps

greater -- traffic jams, and their accompanying problems of air pollution. The Chicago area expressways will serve as just one example. Isn't it possible -- perhaps even likely -- that relief of the present Lincoln-Oakton bottleneck would prove to be both modest and temporary? Is the promised relief so great and so certain as to overwhelm all other considerations and commitments?

Another very serious problem created by this proposed roadway is it would serve to isolate further the library from Skokie's business district and several schools.

Furthermore, the Library Board feels that the proposed connection of Lincoln and Laramie would not be an ideal solution to the Oakton Street intersection problem. It would only move the problem westward - right on the library's doorstep. A real traffic and safety hazard would be created by having such a road intersect Oakton Street at a point only 90 feet from the library entrance.

We are told that there is no feasible alternative to the proposed route for the needed traffic diversion. Are we to assume, then, that if our addition were already built, the planners would have to stand by helplessly and watch the traffic pile up as the business district deteriorates? Of course not. Alternatives would have to be found.

As we look at the planners' proposal, we cannot help but be appalled at the idea of slicing through some of the most valuable and expensive property in Skokie with a roadway that would leave a small odd-shaped parcel on either side. How can we defend rendering virtually useless these two parcels, representing a substantial investment of taxpayer's funds?

While park development is obviously not the Library Board's obligation, as citizens we may ask to what extent can the Village look with equanimity upon the abandonment of a park and recreational site in this already heavily populated, heavily traveled area; particularly when building permits have

already been issued for an extensive adjacent apartment complex?

Do we - as trustees of the public interest representing both the Library and municipal government, really want a major thoroughfare with all of its attendant ugliness, congestion, noise and safety hazards to be implanted in front of the community's most architecturally distinguished building -- and a Library at that?

The planners have advanced the "easy" solution that we simply expand our building to the west. But how much study has been given to the land area that would be required to expand in this direction, providing both adequate parking and building space? How much extra cost would have to be added onto a Library referendum? Our preliminary investigation - in consultation with a prominent Skokie realtor - indicates that the added costs for land acquisition alone would exceed a Third-of-a-Millon Dollars!

Finally, how many months - or years - would be consumed by the condemnation proceedings required to gain title to the area west of the Library?

Does the Village really want to defend such a costly and time-consuming approach, and would the voters be likely to approve it?

It would seem to us that a genuinely cooperative approach would have required that these difficult problems be raised and resolved with the Library and the Village Boards before the planning authorities arrived at a definitive plan.

We submit that the extension of Lincoln Avenue, as presently planned, represents a rather limited conception of the Village planners and does not reflect the over-all belief and responsibility of the Village Board.

III. Conclusion

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize to the Village Board that we are poised to implement a desperately needed program of Library expansion consistent with the expressed intention of the Village to cooperate in a civic-cultural center development. The concept of a downtown park-library civic center

received a great deal of its impetus from a desire to provide a utilitarian as well as aesthetic focal point for the business district's future development. This is still a part of our concern. However, the present plan for the extension of Lincoln Avenue would so effectively destroy the utility of the present building, rather than fostering its expansion, that we would be forced to consider going back to our Citizens Committee with a request that it study the advisability of completely re-locating the Library building.

It seems to us that there are many compelling reasons why the Village Board should give all possible support and encouragement to the joint development of the Oakton Street property envisioned in our original agreement.

Upon a roll call vote, the preceding resolution was approved by the Board of Trustees of the Skokie Public Library at an official meeting held on November 2, 1966, at 4 p. m. in the Library with the following members casting affirmative votes: Member Erickson, Member Griffin, Member Kraft, Member Petty, Member Weiner. Members voting in opposition to the resolution: None.