TO:          HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

FROM:        CITY MANAGER                        DEPARTMENT: PUBLIC WORKS

DATE:        JUNE 24, 2002                        CMR:299:02

SUBJECT:     RESOLUTION APPROVING MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION AND CONCEPTUAL DESIGN OF THE CHILDREN’S LIBRARY EXPANSION PROJECT

REPORT IN BRIEF

Children’s Library was constructed in 1940 and is listed on the City’s Historic Inventory. It is part of the Lucie Stern Community Center and, consequently, has limited expansion opportunities. To alleviate the overcrowded conditions at the library, a feasibility study was prepared in 2000 by Architectural Resources Group (ARG) to determine expansion opportunities. ARG recommended a south and a north addition to Children’s Library, increasing the size from 3,400 square feet (sf) to 10,150 sf. A subsequent building spatial program recommended 12,000 sf to achieve the vision of the New Library Plan.

ARG was also retained to develop the conceptual designs of the Children’s Library expansion. The designs represent a further development of the feasibility study scheme, exploring different massings and floor plans for the expanded facility. Issues surfaced during the design review process, and ARG has revised the designs numerous times in an effort to respond to and resolve all issues. The current design has been reviewed and recommended for Council approval by the appropriate boards and commissions, and the Project Committee. The project cost estimate is $6.5 million. Funding for the project would be provided by bond proceeds, assuming the project is included in a bond measure and the measure passes.

A Mitigated Negative Declaration has been prepared by staff, reviewed by the public, and staff has responded to all comments. The completed document is recommended for adoption.
RECOMMENDATION
Staff recommends that Council:

1. Adopt a Resolution Approving a Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Children’s Library Expansion Project (Attachment E).

2. Approve the conceptual design of the Children’s Library Expansion Project.

BACKGROUND
The Children’s Library is part of the Lucie Stern Community Center. The library was designed in 1940 by Birge Clark, a prominent local architect, and was constructed later that year. It is a 3,400 square foot (sf), single-story, wood-framed building. The library has been designated to the Historic Inventory in Category 1. The adjacent Secret Garden is an historic garden and is used by the library’s patrons as an informal outdoor amenity, and in good weather, as an outdoor study room and a space for the children’s programs.

The Children’s Library suffers from deferred maintenance. Most of its original systems are long past their useful life and need replacement. The building needs a seismic upgrade and a reroof. The library is severely overcrowded because of high use and collection growth and in need of reorganization and expansion. The Secret Garden’s shrubs, pathways and features are in need of renovation.

In April 2000, the Friends of the Palo Alto Library contracted with Architectural Resources Group (ARG) to conduct a feasibility study to determine the options for expanding the Children’s Library. ARG completed the study and delivered the “Final Feasibility Study for the Palo Alto Children’s Library” in June 2000. ARG had developed six different schemes for the expansion of the library, and recommended Scheme 5A as the most suitable. Scheme 5A calls for a one-story north addition and a two-story plus basement south addition. The additions add 6,750 sf to the existing building for a total of 10,150 sf.

In May 2000, the City’s Library Advisory Commission (LAC) produced the New Library Plan (NLP). This document describes the LAC’s recommendations for upgrading the City’s library system, including full renovation and expansion of the Resource Libraries, which include Children’s Library and Main Library in north Palo Alto and Mitchell Park Library in south Palo Alto. Council conceptually approved the NLP in October 2000.

In January 2001, the City retained Phillips Swager Associates (PSA) to prepare programs for the expanded libraries, quantifying the various space needs based on parameters described in the NLP. PSA completed the programs in July 2001 and recommended a total of 12,000 sf to achieve the NLP’s vision for the Children’s Library.
In October 2001, ARG was selected to prepare the conceptual designs of the Children’s Library. ARG’s qualifications include considerable experience in designing renovations and additions to historic buildings, including local and California libraries.

Council has not previously reviewed this project.

**DISCUSSION**

ARG has developed the conceptual designs over the last eight months. The Project Committee, consisting of community representatives, various City board and commission members and key staff has met with the architects regularly to review and discuss the designs. The designs have been presented to and discussed with the City boards and commissions. There were also two community meetings held at the Children’s Library.

During the development of the designs, many specific site and building issues were raised, some resulting in adjustments to the design. The final conceptual design are now complete and the site plan, floor plans, elevations and perspective sketch are included as Attachment A. A brief summary of the key issues that affected the development of the conceptual design follows.

**Program**

The program recommends 12,000 sf for the expanded Children’s Library, with all public spaces on the main floor level for security and efficient staffing. However, the final conceptual design is only 10,625 sf. This is due to the very constricted site, with the library essentially being hemmed in on all four sides. The only way to achieve the 12,000 sf program at the site is to deviate from certain parameters established in the feasibility study. A third floor on the south addition was ruled out because it creates too tall a building mass and does not accommodate the program well. A second floor on the north addition would create a negative impact on the Children’s Theater and residential neighbors and would require an additional elevator and two stairs, considerably reducing the usable area of the addition. A basement under the original library would provide additional space, but was determined to be unsuitable for most of the library functions and very expensive to construct. Expansion into the Secret Garden was to be minimized to lessen the impacts on that historic space. Building the additions over the front setback lines would create a negative impact on the residential neighbors and would require a variance from the City’s zoning ordinance.

**South Alley**

The south addition to the library is planned to be constructed on part of the alley that separates the Children’s Library and the Community Theater. The addition was initially envisioned to be 30 feet wide, reducing the width of the alley to ten feet, which satisfied the building code requirement of a 10-foot separation between two structures. The resulting narrow alley created five concerns for the Lucie Stern Community Center and its users:
1. Fire Department access
2. Emergency exiting from the site
3. Access for workers delivering equipment to the Community Theater
4. Security and sight-line issues
5. Relocation of transformers and other electrical equipment

ARG and City staff met with the Fire Department to resolve the fire fighting access. This will be accomplished by providing an additional fire truck parking area, additional hose outlets, and completing the fire sprinkler system in the Children’s Theater.

ARG retained a fire protection engineer to address the issue of emergency exiting throughout the Lucie Stern complex. The engineer visited the site and prepared a report stating that a 10-foot wide south alley would be wide enough to accommodate the maximum number of facility users exiting through the alley during an emergency.

ARG and City staff met twice with the users of the Community Theater to address the access issue. A 10-foot wide alley would be too narrow for delivery trucks to reach the side doors of the Community Theater, where workers load and unload musical instruments and stage sets. To accommodate the theater productions, the south addition was narrowed, widening the alley by three feet to create a 13-foot wide alley. This additional width will allow pick-up trucks to be loaded and unloaded while still providing space for pedestrians to pass. Widening the alley also alleviates much of the concern about security and sight lines.

To allow trucks to pass down the alley, a transformer and a large piece of electrical equipment that serve the Community Theater will need to be relocated. The alley will be re-graded to provide safe, level access for both the Children’s Library and the Community Theater stage area. Also, the wall treatments and pavement in the south alley will be improved to provide a better pedestrian experience.

**South Addition**
Narrowing of the south addition resulted in a significant loss of square footage for the library, which was already less than the programmed amount. ARG developed a number of different plans that compensated for this loss. Some of these plans had the south addition extending into the Secret Garden. Other plans had a portion of the south addition wrapping around the front of the original library. Other plans removed the south ten feet of the original library in order to accommodate a wider addition. All these plans gained back some of the square footage lost when the south addition was narrowed, but created impacts to the historic building and Secret Garden. The impacts of each plan are discussed below.
South addition extending into Secret Garden:
The south addition extends about 20 feet into the southeast quadrant of the Secret Garden, converting about 400 sf, or 5%, of Secret Garden space into a stairwell and a glass-enclosed reading room looking onto the Secret Garden. Five trees are lost in the Secret Garden by the addition, representing 20% of the trees, and will be compensated for by planting additional trees elsewhere in the Lucie Stern complex. The southeast quadrant is the least used quadrant of the Secret Garden and only rarely accommodates programs for the Children’s Library. It is, however, the only quadrant of the Garden that is still in its original configuration. Previously, the Children’s Theater expanded into the two west quadrants of the Secret Garden. ARG and staff have reviewed the plans and conclude that: 1) because only a small percentage of the Garden is affected by the south addition, 2) the affected Garden space is not well utilized currently, and 3) the addition opens onto and creates a more usable indoor-outdoor space with the Garden, that the impacts to the Secret Garden are not significant.

Removing ten feet of original library:
This plan was considered because it allowed the south addition to become wider and, consequently, created additional space in the basement and on the second floor. However, it has a significant impact on the historic structure and therefore raised concerns about the design meeting the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation (Secretary’s Standards).

Wrapping the south addition around the front of the historic library:
This plan created additional square footage, but also has a negative impact on the historic building because it blocks the view of a portion of the primary façade. Consequently, this plan also raised concerns about meeting the Secretary’s Standards.

In conclusion, based upon comments and direction from staff and the Historic Resources Board, ARG will develop plans during the schematic design phase that do not remove any length of the historic building and that do not have additions that wrap around the front of the historic building.

North Addition
The north addition abuts the northeast quadrant of the Secret Garden, but will not reduce the size of the Garden. The addition is only one story in keeping with the adjacent residential neighborhood and is set back from the historic building, conditions that meet the Secretary’s Standards. A transformer for the Children’s Theater is located where the north addition is planned and would be relocated.

Floor Plans
The floor plans work fairly well, considering they are being concentrated into less square footage than recommended in the program. Additionally, there are inherent compromises associated with adding onto an existing structure. The collection areas, program room,
circulation areas, and working areas have all been significantly increased in size. A new front entry in the south addition allows the checkout and circulation functions to be adjacent which is valuable for staff efficiency. There is a view through the south addition from the front door into the Secret Garden. A large program room in the north addition can be opened up onto the Secret Garden for indoor/outdoor programs, or be used as a homework/study room. The north addition also has restrooms and a kitchenette, allowing it to be closed off from the rest of the library to potentially serve as an off-hour community meeting room.

Historic Impact
The majority of the historic context of the original library is retained. The roof will be strengthened and waterproofed and the original tiles will be reinstalled. The north exterior wall, including the fireplace, will be mostly retained to become the interior wall separating the original building from the north addition. Many of the interior components of the original building will be retained. The original front entry porch will be retained, although a new main entry is included in the south addition. The existing south entry porch will be removed to accommodate the south addition.

Secret Garden & Landscaping
As part of the project, the Secret Garden will be fully renovated, retaining all of the existing historic components except for five trees. The existing trees will be pleached (pruned and trained to form a canopy). The front yard will be enclosed by a low brick wall and a gate to de-emphasize the previous front entrance and to provide a safe area for children. A section of the original brick wall around the perimeter of the Garden will be reconstructed to become an interior wall in the south addition. The south addition will have a glass reading room to integrate with the Secret Garden.

Parking
The Children’s Library patrons park in the Lucie Stern parking lot or on Harriet and Hopkins Streets in front of the library. The additional parking demand generated by the expanded library has been calculated at ten spaces. To accommodate this additional demand, to establish a future bank of parking spaces for potential expansion of other Lucie Stern facilities, and to help alleviate an existing overcrowded condition, the Lucie Stern parking lot will be reconfigured as part of the project.

There is a CIP project currently under design to provide new lighting for the Lucie Stern parking lot. If Children’s Library is included in a bond measure and the measure passes, this CIP project will be cancelled as the lot will be reconfigured. Lighting will be included in the reconfigured parking lot.

BOARD AND COMMISSION REVIEW
The designs have been reviewed by the Library Advisory Commission, the Architectural Review Board, the Historical Resources Board (HRB), and the Planning and
Transportation Commission. The consensus of those who reviewed the designs is that the plans accomplish the goals of the feasibility study and integrate well with the Lucie Stern complex. The HRB concluded initially that the south addition was not in conformance with the Secretary’s Standards because it was too massive, was too far forward of the original building, and dominated instead of being subordinate to the original building. However, ARG revised the designs and presented them to the HRB in a special meeting on June 12, 2002. After reviewing the revised designs, a staff report, and a peer review report, the HRB passed a motion that stated the revised plans can be made to conform with the Secretary’s Standards without further reductions in the size of the south addition. Certain architectural treatments and modifications will be developed during the next phase of design to accomplish this. Formal recommendations from the Boards and Commissions are included in Attachment B.

**RESOURCE IMPACT**

ARG has prepared a construction cost estimate for the project, totaling $4.0 million. Staff has added the other project costs, including design, construction management, contingencies, allowances and escalation, to arrive at a total project capital cost of $6.5 million. This includes the renovation of the Secret Garden, reconfiguration of the Lucie Stern parking lot, the relocation of the transformers and electrical equipment, and completing the fire sprinklers at the Children’s Theater. It does not include furnishings, estimated at $455,000, or any staffing, operation, or maintenance costs, which are estimated at $682,000 per year. See Attachment C for a summary of the project costs. Since proceeds from a bond measure cannot be used to pay for furnishings, operation, maintenance, staffing or other on-going costs, the City will need to identify other funding sources for these costs.

The City Manager has convened the Community Facilities Cost Advisory Committee to review the cost estimates of all the community facility projects being considered for the bond measure. The Committee consists of six professionals in the building industry, including architects, developers, contractors, construction managers, and public works staff from other cities. The Committee has met four times. It will issue a report stating its conclusions and recommendations regarding the various cost estimates. The Committee’s report will be included in the Council packets for the Council meeting on July 15, 2002.

Current staffing levels are inadequate to proceed into final design and construction of all of the projects if a bond measure were to pass in November. The 2002-03 Proposed Budget document includes the following additions to the Table of Organization: an Engineering Technician III, a Senior Project Manager, and an Office Specialist. These additions to the Public Works Department have an annual ongoing cost of $246,640 in salary and benefits expense. The funding of these positions will be requested by a Budget Amendment Ordinance only after a successful November 2002 bond measure vote. Staff may also request one Library position to support the building planning process; however,
these needs are still being reviewed. The cost of three Public Works positions can be capitalized as part of the construction process and could therefore be financed as part of the bond measure as long as they are directly related to design and construction activities. These positions are not permanent and would be terminated upon project completion or absorbed through attrition of similar positions.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS
This recommendation does not represent any change to existing City policies.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW
This project is being reviewed per the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Staff has prepared a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for the project, which addresses the potential environmental impacts and identifies mitigation measures included in the project that would reduce impacts to a less than significant level. The MND has gone through the public review process and staff has responded to all comments (see Attachment D). The City Council received copies of the Initial Study and the MND at the beginning of the review period. Staff recommends that Council approve and certify the MND by adopting the attached Resolution (Attachment E).

ATTACHMENTS
Attachment A: Site plan, floor plans, elevations, perspective sketch
Attachment B: Recommendations on the conceptual designs from the Boards and Commissions
Attachment C: Summary of project cost estimate
Attachment D: Mitigated Negative Declaration, including comments and responses
Attachment E: Resolution Adopting a Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Children’s Library Expansion Project

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