



Statement on the Johnson County Public Library Franklin Branch

June 6, 2011

This conversation began almost two years ago, when on August 9, 2009, the City Council unanimously approved the issuance of a \$2 million bond that would allow the Library to move forward with preliminary site investigation and development, engineering and architectural expenditures related to a new Franklin branch.

In February of 2010, the RDC adopted a very detailed and thorough market analysis to help the city plan for its own development. The study encouraged, among other things, the need to invest in creating an activity area for downtown.

The study noted that if the Johnson County Public Library did move forward with plans for a new library in Franklin, we had a wonderful opportunity to spark redevelopment by having the new branch built in downtown. The study noted that today's libraries serve multiple roles: as places of cultural activity, information centers supporting new and existing businesses, and as platforms for learning experiences. In short, a downtown library would be a very strong economic catalyst and traffic generator for downtown businesses.

We have seen similar themes expressed by the library. Over the past few years, the library has conducted numerous town hall meetings and presentations with the public and with government boards, including the Council and RDC. I believe that the board has made efforts to involve many voices in the discussion up to this point. From this point forward there are still many opportunities for more public input before any facility would move forward.

As mayor, I know that there are many people who support this project. Over the past several weeks I have talked to many residents and business professionals. This weekend I was out walking the neighborhoods and talked to many people. Both businesses and residents informed me that, while they had questions over cost or location, overall they see great potential of it being part of the downtown if it gets voter support. The people that I spoke with stated that if they were asked they would support the project on two conditions, namely that it (1) must be done in such a way as to not raise their taxes and, (2) if it was part of the downtown it should be reachable by car and by pedestrian walks and trails.

Further, some asked about the idea of building in a flood plain. When it was noted that any design would require that the occupied space of the building itself would be above the flood plain, they said that made sense.

Last but not least it was noted by Councilman Abban that if the RDC ultimately builds a parking facility it should be operated by the city for both library and public use. I and the people who made comments to me this weekend agree with that, and I also believe that whether or not the library comes downtown, we still need to think very hard about our downtown parking. We can discuss that as more estimates come in, and implement a variety of strategies that can improve downtown's ability to handle future parking needs.

There are of course those who have their reasons for opposing the project, and I respect their point of view.

Personally, I have always supported the concept of a downtown library. I'm sure there are those of you who remember me years ago arguing against moving the library from downtown to its current location on State Street. I believed at the time that having the library downtown was central to keeping Franklin's downtown core alive and vibrant. I still believe that if the library project does move forward, a downtown location will improve the quality of life for our citizens.

But, at the end of the day this discussion is not just about what I want. It is about what the community wants, and what the taxpayers feel is in the greatest good for Franklin's future.

What we should focus on tonight is advancing the discussion with the community's best interest at heart in an effort to help the library board with their project. The Library Board needs to know if we as a city are willing to work with them if the voters decide that they want a downtown library.

In presentations to the city council and in local public meetings, the library has shared its long range master plan -- including the future of its countywide facilities. The Franklin Branch project is currently the priority. However, it is my understanding that if the community and council do not support the project in Franklin, their long range plan would call for them to move forward with the White River Project and the City of Franklin would lose that opportunity. Also, as it is a county wide library district that we are part of, Franklin would still end up paying for a new library project in another part of the county.

It is my hope that after tonight's discussion, we as elected officials who have been given the trust of the public can move forward together with a vision that takes into account the many issues that I believe are important to Franklin's citizens, and give the Library Board the ability to finish a plan to bring forward to the voters. They simply cannot do that if this group does not tell them up front that we are willing to support a downtown plan if the voters do.

Mayor Fred L. Paris