

Planning for the Edgartown Library: An Overview from Pages of Edgartown Town Reports

The expansion of the Edgartown Public Library first appears on a list of proposed capital outlays for the town in the Capital Programs Committee pages of the Edgartown Annual Report for the year 1985. Only 10 years after the town's 1975 building addition, the need for another expansion was being publicly acknowledged in the Town Report.

Looking beyond its six-year planning timeline, the committee wrote:

"Capital projects that may be 'over the horizon' and not included here are business systems for Town Hall (computer based), auditorium and art center at the Regional High School, a bike path on Chappaquiddick and completion of the West Tisbury Road bike path."

Of these "over-the-horizon" projects, every one has long since been completed but the Chappy bike path, which remains controversial. In fact, several major capital projects not even anticipated by the Edgartown Capital Programs Committee back in 1985 have since then been planned, funded, built and put into service – including the \$16 million Edgartown Elementary School, significant upgrades and expansions of the Edgartown Wastewater Treatment Plant, the new visitor center and public rest rooms on Church Street, the purchase of the Edgartown Water Company, the purchase of land to expand the Edgartown Cemetery and the construction of the Morgan Woods affordable housing community.

In the 1986 Edgartown Annual Report, the Capital Programs Committee pages show the library expansion project on a timeline that sets FY 1991 as the year for building. In the 1987 Report, the committee dispenses with the timeline and simply lists 10 important capital projects in the span from 1989-1994, totaling \$15.2 million. That list includes \$750,000 for the Edgartown Library expansion.

In 1988, the capital programs timeline was back in the Annual Report, and the breakdown for the Library included \$782,000 for the expansion in 1991, \$156,000 for new furnishings in 1992 and \$50,000 for "expansion of automated services" in 1993—this last related to Edgartown's joining the CLAMS regional library network. In the 1989 Report, the committee pushed the library's construction year back to 1993, but boosted the anticipated cost to slightly over \$1 million.

In 1990, the Capital Programs committee report shrank from several pages to a fraction of a page, and the committee wrote: "Uncertain economic conditions make it nonproductive to try to go any further in defining project priorities at this time than what was included in the 1989 committee report." The committee's main focus, it reported, was on completing the new public rest rooms on Church Street.

The committee's report for the 1991 report was grim. "There must be an adjective," the committee wrote, "that says why this is not the time to talk about government spending in Edgartown." The Library project was included, near the end of the report, in a list of "Capital Projects on the Horizon for Fiscal 1993-1998," with a cost of \$750,000. Also on that list was \$12 million for improvement and expansion of the Edgartown wastewater system.

In its 1992 report, the committee noted Edgartown's recent completion of several projects: "We have built a new police station, renovated the town hall, rebuilt a visitors center, repaired the town clock, bought new computers, built an elementary school addition and voted for an addition at the regional high." Looking ahead at a list of capital needs that also included cemetery land, a new airfield hangar and a new highway department building, the committee concluded: "Somehow, we must put these needs into a five-year plan without raising taxes astronomically in any one year." The committee's proposed list of projects, with their estimated costs, omitted any funding for expansion of the Library.

The Capital Program Committee's 1993 report came against the background of an \$11.4 million town meeting article for the new Edgartown Wastewater Treatment Plant: "It hopefully is the last large expenditure for a few years." The Edgartown Library building project reappeared on the committee's six-year list, with construction set for FY 1998 and total costs projected at \$1.3 million.

The need for a new elementary school appears for the first time in the committee's 1994 report, with the comment: "The School, which was unexpected, will involve a grant of around 50%, but it still leaves a large amount to be paid by us." Costs attached to the school over the next five years were projected at \$8,661,000.

The Library project appears once more on the 1994 list, with a total of \$3,685,000 attached to it, and with construction now pushed back to FY 2001. This would be the last year in which the report of the Capital Program Committee made any mention of the Library expansion. The committee made its last submission to the Edgartown Annual Report for the year 1997, and since then has been silent.