Advisory Council Special Meeting Minutes
4pm, November 14, 2017
Room 207

Present: Tom Bender, Julia Foulkes, Jean Strouse, Sally Webster

NYPL Staff: Tina Branham, Melissa Gasparotto, Denise Hibay, Risa Honig, William Kelly

Guests: Stephen McHale (Beyer Blinder Belle), Carmen Pereira (Mecanoo)

This special Advisory Council meeting served as a preview of the NYPL Midtown Campus Master Plan, which was released to the public and approved by the Library Board of Trustees on November 15.

Bill Kelly welcomed the group and contextualized the Library’s approach to the master planning process. Noted architectural firms Mecanoo and Beyer Blinder Belle were brought on to help reimagine use of the Schwarzman building’s space to better serve the diversity of visitors and researchers, while following the principle “do no harm” to the historic building.

The Advisory Council viewed a video overview of the building renovation plans, and Stephen McHale of Beyer Blinder Belle walked through the master plan’s phases. The plan builds on completed preparatory work, including the Mid-Manhattan Library swing space, bathroom renovations, and HVAC upgrades for collections preservation. Key work going forward in three phases over the next four years will expand and renovate Schwarzman exhibition spaces and multipurpose rooms, consolidate researcher spaces on higher levels of the building, add a new entrance on 40th Street that opens to a new Center for Research and Learning, and create a new cafe and larger space for the library store. The plan also adds a new elevator core and stairwell on the south end of the building to better connect these spaces, and consolidates staff functions in areas out of the way from public uses. The building will remain open throughout these phased renovations, which will total $317 million.

The stacks are not yet incorporated into the master plan, and McHale announced a new study of that space, which Beyer Blinder Belle will complete in the coming months. Kelly emphasized the importance of maintaining an open mind about the outcome of the stacks study.

In the following discussion Advisory Council members expressed overall support for the plan, noting with particular approval the new 40th St entrance, renovation of bathrooms throughout the building, and a better cafe to serve researchers who need to be in the building for long hours at a time. Members expressed a desire for added considerations in the plan, most notably a separate space in the cafe where the library’s scholars could gather, and for other collaborative
work spaces. Kelly noted that the mezzanine area of the cafe could potentially be used for this purpose, although specifics remain to be seen. Others noted concern over added traffic in the reading rooms near the proposed cafe. McHale responded that strategic soundproofing could be integrated, and Kelly pointed out that the cafe would not be accessible from an outside entrance, thus limiting non-NYPL foot traffic. Advisory Council members also suggested that the needs of visiting researchers from out of town merit consideration during the space planning process, noting that these scholars may require extended access to research spaces.

Kelly added that there will be a public forum on the Midtown Campus Master Plan on Monday, November 20th at 5pm in the Celeste Auditorium, as well as a follow-up public meeting to be announced at a later date.