

Aurora Public Library seeks higher tech bookmobile

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This rendering shows what part of the new Aurora Public Library bookmobile would look like. (Aurora Public Library District)

The Aurora Public Library District is raising money for what it hopes is a new bookmobile by the middle of next year.

Last week, members of the Library District board and the Library Foundation met to reveal renderings of what Will

Wong, foundation vice president, called a “new, greener, more tech-focused bookmobile.”

“A bookmobile has served us since 1953, but never has it been so well designed with technology for the future,” he said.

Joe Filipeck, Library Board president, pointed out that the bookmobile is the primary library for about 20% of the library district’s most vulnerable children.

Michaela Haberkern, Aurora Public Library executive director, said the bookmobile truly is one of the library’s three branches.

“The bookmobile provides the same great services as all our locations — and it’s mobile,” she said.

“We focus our bookmobile services on those who have difficulty getting to a branch location — students and those in congregate settings — and those parts of town not close to another location.”

The current bookmobile goes back 18 years, to 2003, and has been costing the library district a lot of money, not to mention downtime, for repairs. The district has begun a campaign to raise the about \$450,000 needed to design and build a new bookmobile.

The Library Foundation received a seed grant from the Dunham Foundation, and had about \$265,000 raised when the coronavirus pandemic hit in 2020 and delayed fund-raising for a while. It now has about \$280,000, and has begun a capital campaign to raise the rest.

The need for the bookmobile was even more urgent during the pandemic, according to Delia Nila Basile, one of the capital campaign co-chairs.

“When the pandemic is considered over, the impact of it on vulnerable children and others will have lasting consequences,” Basile said. “We must act now.”

Aurora Ald. Sherman Jenkins, at large, the other co-chair, pointed out that philanthropy and the fundraising work of the foundation have long covered gaps in the library funding.

“Of your property tax bill, a very small percentage of it is allocated to the library,” he said. “There is a significant gap between the operating budget and the services we must provide.”

The new bookmobile would provide a flexible space to support early, digital, recreational, civic, multi-cultural, informational, functional, content and critical literacy, according to library officials.

It will have a greater variety of collections than it does now, adjustable workstations, free wi-fi and state-of-the-art computer stations, resources for educators, demonstration capability for STEM crafts and more space for story times, officials said.

Heather Sturm, Library District neighborhood services director, said the new bookmobile would be greener too. Instead of a diesel generator, it would have a battery-driven electric generator, with integrated solar panels.

Once the new bookmobile hits the road, the Library District will fund ongoing operations. The Library Foundation will create an endowment for maintenance, materials and other needs.