

Grass Roots: Is rainmaking potential of library rooftop garden being overlooked?

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Even before he took office this week, newly reelected Mayor Paul Soglin was sounding an alarm on the Central Library redevelopment project, saying he is reluctant to move ahead before the \$8 million piece of the project's \$29.5 million price tag to be raised privately is assured.

Well, if you're trying to build excitement and attract donations for a new library downtown, you might want to look at putting a community garden on the roof, say garden advocates. It could be a rainmaker.

Existing community gardens in the city's popular program attract people like cone flowers lure bees, they say.

And the possibilities of a food-producing garden downtown in a foodie city like Madison?

"The synergies are just perfect," says Jane Anne Morris, a member of the Downtown Community Gardens Group that began in late 2009 to make the case for a community garden on the roof of a new Central Library. They say a garden can be added to the roof of the redeveloped library on West Mifflin Street for about \$300,000, as detailed in a report you can see in the attached PDF.

That's less than half the \$775,344 cost projected in a report by city staff -- which also paints a rooftop garden as a pretty undesirable option -- that the City Council accepted Tuesday over the pleas of the gardeners. The staff cost projections, with such items as a

\$21,800 tool shed, seem to go for the most costly materials and time-consuming and complex construction, gardeners protest.

"Instead of an obstacle, they might have seen a garden as a way to reach out to the community, and they might get some mileage out of it," Morris says. Some money from garden-loving, locavore donors, too, perhaps.

Downtown Ald. Mike Verveer stressed that the City Council's nod to the staff report isn't the last word on the library garden. He says the city needs to find places for community gardens in the downtown area, where gardeners say high property prices and polluted soils make rooftop gardens an obvious choice

It's being done elsewhere, they say, including at the nearby Madison Children's Museum, the Community Growers CSA in Milwaukee and the Gary Comer Youth Center in Chicago.

Jeanne Hoffman, the city's Facilities and Sustainability Manager, says putting a community garden on the roof would require a third elevator shaft in the building, and that is what drives up the price. The increased public access to the roof that a garden supposes also would require safety improvements that boost costs, she says.

The green roof now planned for the library would employ banks of sedum plants to control storm water runoff and protect roof materials from sun damage at a cost of about \$95,000; \$265,000 if there is enough money to expand the area with plants from 4,000 square feet to cover most of the 14,000-square-foot roof, says city staff.

It's not that a roof-top garden is not feasible, it's that it's not in the budget, Hoffman says. "We have a \$29.5 million budget, and we have every intention of doing everything we can to re-imagine and reinvigorate the library and stay within that budget," she says. "I don't think anything in the design of the library precludes a

community garden if funding was available or if in the future it was determined that the stakeholders want to move forward on it."

Amid speculation on the potential costs of delaying the library project in lost fundraising momentum and rising prices, mayoral assistant Sally Miley said Thursday only that Soglin is meeting next week with members of the Madison Public Library Foundation, which will be raising the private funds for the project.

Despite any uncertainty about when the library redevelopment might start, City Council members this week okayed a \$92,380 contract with New York-based American Interfile and Library Services for consultation on the logistics of moving library materials to and from a still being negotiated temporary storage space.

And the city is ready to move ahead, says Hoffman. "The contract can be executed and that's what we intend to do."

http://host.madison.com/wsj/news/local/govt-and-politics/article_543c0ce6-6a21-11e0-b1b1-001cc4c002e0.html