



# Cary Memorial Library

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Submitted by:

Cary Memorial Library Board of Trustees Executive Committee

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The Cary Memorial Library Board of Trustees is pleased to announce their decision to use the Stone Building as a Lexington Heritage Center. The Trustees are charged with oversight of operations within the Stone Building located at 735 Massachusetts Avenue. The building has been used as a Branch Library since 1892 although there are actually seven purposes defined in the deed:

1. A branch library
2. A public reading room
3. A public art museum
4. A meeting place for classes
5. Public lectures authorized by the Trustees of Cary Library
6. A room for children and youth of Lexington under the supervision of the Trustees
7. Any other purposes that the Trustees find consistent with the Library's mission.

There has been much discussion throughout the past twenty years regarding the feasibility of maintaining a branch library in the Stone Building. Most recently, renovation of the existing Cary Memorial Library building resulted in an increased demand for services at that location.

In August of 2007, the Branch Library was forced to close due to a flood, which caused further damage to a building already in need of serious repair and renovation. The Branch Library remained closed throughout 2008. In April of 2007 Town Meeting had already awarded Community Preservation Funds for a comprehensive study to provide a structural, preservation, mechanical and building code analysis of the building. While this study was underway, the Trustees held a Community Forum at Follen Church on March 16, 2008 to discuss future uses of the Stone Building. Over 100 Lexington residents attended this open meeting to express their views concerning community needs and how the Stone Building might address those needs; many residents voiced a need for space for meetings, performances, lectures, a library presence and opportunities to gather together as community. Also, during this time, Library Staff and Trustees attended many other public meetings to explain the process for determining future use of the building and to hear questions and concerns from residents.

After the Comprehensive Study was issued in Spring 2008, the Trustees invited groups interested in using the Stone Building to submit a Letter of Interest/Proposal for Possible Use of the Stone Building to the Trustees. Six groups submitted Letters of Interest by the September 22, 2008 deadline: Lexington4Libraries; Waldorf School; Friends of Arlington's Great Meadows; Investigators' Club; Lexington Heritage Center; and Cary Memorial Library. All six groups participated in a public hearing hosted by the Trustees at Cary Hall on October 2, 2008 to discuss the proposals and to answer questions from the Trustees and Lexington residents.

The Trustees feel strongly that the Stone Building is a significant town property of great historical importance. It defines the East Lexington Village of the early 1800s and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Lexington Merchant Eli Robbins commissioned this property in 1832 to serve as a public building where meetings and assemblies could be held and where freedom of speech could be allowed. It was designed by Isaac Melvin who was also architect of the present Unitarian Church on the Green. Melvin's designs are based on Asher Benjamin's famous pattern book The Practice of Architecture. In its early years the Stone Building attracted such notable speakers as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Charles Sumner, Wendell Phillips, Theodore Parker, Josiah Quincy, Jr. and Julia Ward Howe.

The Board of Library Trustees has invested a great deal of time and thought in considering a future use of the building that would respect Ellen Stone's guidelines as well as honor the historic integrity of the building. Letters of interest that were presented at the October 2nd Public Hearing have sparked an enthusiasm to expand the level of services to the community beyond those of a branch library. Based upon these letters and public comment, the Trustees recommend using the Town's proposal of "The Lexington Heritage Center" as the principal concept with incorporation of elements from several other "Letters of Interest". The Board wants to increase the number of hours the building could be open, and create much needed meeting, performance, exhibit and lecture space as well as a library presence. The Heritage Center proposal would allow this to happen.

The Trustees are in the process of requesting a more fully developed plan so that discussions can continue with interested parties.

Please address questions or comments to:

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