



Letter To Editor: City Of Alton/Hayner Library Board Unveil Ongoing Discussions To Transform Haskell House Into Fully Updated Children's Library

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ALTON - Today, the City of Alton and Hayner Public Library Board of Trustees President unveiled ongoing discussions to transform the Haskell House into a fully-updated Children's Library in partnership with the anticipated Children's Museum.



"We are making this public now due to an increasing amount of questions about it, and also to spread the word to other interested community partners who may want to be involved as the process continues," said Kevin Botterbush, Hayner Board of Trustees President. "

Alderman Strebel has presented this idea to members of our Board, and though the specifics still need to be filled in and there is much work to be done on the Haskell House to make it suited for renovation into a library, I see a real path forward. I look forward to discussing more specifics with my Board as they develop. It is a very exciting time for all."

"We are thrilled with the possibility of working with Hayner and its board to bring this vision to life," said Alderman Ray Strebel. "The Haskell House has long been vacant. This is a perfect synergy. The Haskell House is next to a beautiful park, in the middle of a family-friendly neighborhood, and has a child's playhouse next to it. It has band concerts in the summer and sledding in the winter. A Children's Library could reinforce all this wonder and bring a new life to the Haskell House and the great gift that the Haskell Family gave to Alton by giving it to the city. Imagine local schools taking day

trips to the park and the library, and families taking out books and having picnics in the park and playing on the playground. It would be truly special.”

The Haskell Children’s Museum team is very excited about this new plan. Sue Utgaard from the Children’s Museum team stated: “We are in full support of this plan. We always believed a public space for children in Alton is important. For many years we had a stand-alone Children’s Library and bringing this concept in combination with our museum would be a perfect use for the Haskell House. We intend to explore with our Board and Museum donors our options for using available funds for interactive exhibits and children’s play areas with the new Children’s Library to help create an interactive and wonderful learning environment. That would truly be a great thing for all children.”

“I am in full support of this plan,” said David Goins, Mayor of Alton. “A children’s museum was a great idea for the Haskell House. The idea of a Children’s Library builds on that concept and expands it. It’s all about the kids. The Haskell House and park have long been a core part of our community, and with a Children’s Library, it will become even more of a beautiful asset to Alton’s children and families. Repairs are needed to make the Haskell House suited for such a transformation. I believe we must do it now. The Hayner Public Library District is a beloved member of our community and would be a perfect partner in this project. I am delighted to bring a stand-alone Children’s Library and a Children’s Museum together in Alton and fill the Haskell House with life once again!”

The current plan is as follows:

1. The City of Alton intends to fix up the exterior and basic interior of the Haskell house to be up to code and prevent further damage to the house. The parking lot area and back ramp will also need work.
 - There has already been approximately \$70,000 allocated to repair the roof, which will start within a very short amount of time.
 - An additional \$250,000 from the City’s ARPA fund is being considered to immediately advance major structural maintenance and refurbishment.

Then, the following plan will be presented to the Hayner board:

2. While ongoing exterior and refurbishment work is underway, Hayner and the Haskell Children’s Museum could hire an architectural firm to do complete renderings and possible costs associated with a complete refurbishment of the interior, turning it into a world-class Children’s Library.

3. Once that rendering is complete and the exterior and refurbishment work has made the building secure, Hayner could enter into a long-term lease for the Haskell House and begin work to renovate the interior into a Children's Library, with other interested community partners helping support and advance that process.

The general hope is that this work could be completed within two years, with a grand opening by Christmas 2024.

If you are interested in helping see the Hayner Children's Library come to fruition, please contact Ray Strebel, Kevin Botterbush, or Mayor Goins to see how you can get involved.

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