

## **Planning Board Narrative**

### **Why a Contract Zone Agreement**

The Library's objective in applying for a contract zone is to ensure that its building plans can meet current Zoning and Land Use regulations. Since 1947 when the Library procured its original 90' x 100' property, major changes to its building configuration, past actions by the Town, and adoption of the Zoning and Land Use Ordinances in 1988, have resulted in the Library lot and structure becoming nonconforming.

The reasons behind this current nonconformity fall into four general categories:

- the first is that structures built before 1988 (except for those in the Shoreland Zone) did not have to meet any dimensional or performance standards (four of the existing Library rooms were built before 1988);
- two Town Meeting warrant articles, one in 1979 and the other in 1990, to transfer Town land to the Library were approved but property deeds were never completed or recorded at the Registry of Deeds;
- the Town's construction of the Village Green in the late 1990's caused the Library to lose its road frontage, parking, legal access to its property and the ability to place a sign on its property adjacent to a public road; and
- the Library expanded its footprint twice after 1988, each time expanding onto town property without the deeds being recorded, and without any known written agreement.

The proposed Contract Zone Agreement (CZA), along with other, related documents between the Town and the Library, are intended to remedy this situation and ensure that we are in conformance with all land use regulations, now and in the future.

### **The justification for the projects that the CZA would enable**

The Library started its most recent and on-going strategic planning work in 2021. Our overall strategic goal is to *increase the resilience and sustainability of the Library to ensure the long-term delivery of relevant and engaging programs that serve all community members*. The trustees chose to work on two aspects of this overarching goal first: 1) the adequacy of our built infrastructure, and 2) the breadth of our program and service offerings.

### **Adequacy of facility**

The Trustees assessed the Library's infrastructure in terms of our resilience and sustainability goals, including program and service capacity, accessibility, structural integrity, operating costs, and carbon footprint in 2022.

### **What the assessment found**

We identified multiple deficiencies, including inadequate insulation, accessibility issues, minor and major repair needs, and high heating and cooling costs. Several of these deficiencies have been or can be resolved within the current building footprint, requiring no zoning appeals.

Other deficiencies identified include lack of storage space, no private space for staff, a non-ADA-compliant staff bathroom, and no dedicated quiet, private patron space. Other identified deficiencies were structural problems in the current book sale room and non-fiction room. While

not immediately concerning, these structural issues do need to be addressed to meet our sustainability and resiliency goals.

### **Adequacy of programs and service offerings**

Like most businesses and institutions in 2020, our in-person visits dropped dramatically because of the COVID epidemic. Since then, patrons have returned, and 660 new patrons have registered just in the last three and a half years, resulting in a growing demand for our facility and services, both in terms of program and event attendance, as well as the informal use of our facilities. People visit the Library for a change of scenery from home, a chance to make social connections, or to have a quiet place to work or read. In addition, our robust programming for youth from birth through early adolescence and our popular on-going adult programs means that there are times when the Library is bustling with activity and louder than one would expect in a library.

We have been aware for years that the libraries like ours have grown from just a book-lending institution to an important community gathering place. Community members use meet over shared interests, read a newspaper or magazine, or drop in for a chat with other patrons or the friendly Library staff, to name just a few.

### **Summary of needs:**

- 1) a re-build of our current book sale and nonfiction rooms, each on a different footprint;
- 2) additional storage space to free up our conference room for meetings and programs;
- 3) a private staff area with ADA-compliant entrance and bathroom;
- 4) more opportunities for community members to make meaningful connections; and
- 5) more space and more diverse types of spaces, including quieter and more private areas, to accommodate a wider variety of programming and community needs.

### **Externally identified needs**

**Local level:** During this timeframe, the Town of Casco worked on and adopted its 2024 Comprehensive Plan. Among other things, the Plan identified the need for multi-generational gathering spaces where people can connect with others to engage in social and recreational activities, particularly non-sports activities in our village centers. Casco Public Library, in the heart of Casco Village, is free and open to anyone of any means and, with its warm and welcoming atmosphere, is in a unique position to continue and expand these types of opportunities.

**State level:** In 2022-3, the Governor's Office, through the Department of Economic and Community Development, and the Maine State Library announced their desire to attract and support remote workers by offering grants to libraries to enable them to provide the space and services those workers would need. Even in the '90's, a number of libraries across the state had already initiated programs to support workers, but the COVID epidemic brought these needs to the forefront. Since this competitive grant opportunity dovetailed nicely with our strategic direction, Casco Public Library applied for and received a grant for \$100,000, the highest amount awarded.

### **Addressing these deficiencies has led us to apply for a Contract Zone**

The Library proposes to rebuild the book sale room on a smaller, altered footprint for ADA-compliant, private staff areas; rebuild the nonfiction room on a larger footprint for accessibility improvements and additional storage space; and add a 1,000 square foot space to the front of our building to provide a multi-purpose space that will house the desired quiet, private areas. The Library cannot undertake all these projects that would benefit the community without the zoning changes requested in the Contract Zone Agreement.

### **How and why we chose the location for the proposed addition**

Initially it was not in our plan to build a completely new room. We tried to accommodate our needs by looking at a variety of options within or with a slightly expanded footprint of our existing building and faced a number of constraints. It was only when we looked at a separate but connected room on land that we own that we were able to overcome those constraints. The following is a list of the benefits from that decision:

- The south facing roof structure allows for future solar panel expansion
- The proposed footprint allows for effective use as a multipurpose room with additional space for confidential work, including telehealth appointments
- A free-standing building ends up being more economical to build
- All the older roofs of the Library were not built to current codes and would not support any additional load of overbuilds
- A free-standing building increases fire safety because it is separate from other parts of the building

### **How the proposed addition will impact the community**

- a change to the current sidewalk and line of sight along the front of the Library
- the placement of the addition on a small portion of the Village Green
- formation of an enclosed courtyard with amenities
- creation of two outdoor spaces between the Library and the Village Green
- availability of diverse types of spaces for (free) community use
- delivering additional services – spaces for telehealth visits, private conference calls, exam and test taking, and technology for remote workers

### **Images of what it could look like**

The four images in this package of materials provide a realistic picture of what the addition would look like. Each image is captioned with explanatory text.

### **Public Support**

#### **General Support**

- 70 separate donations from our community in support of all our infrastructure projects
- The Library receiving eight competitive grants for its project work
- The Comprehensive Plan's overall philosophy of building a resilient community, including strengthening community connections, as well as the specific strategy to "Support increased funding for the Library to provide additional multi-generational activities."

#### **Specific Support**

- Maine State Library grant for \$100,000

- \$50,000 competitive grant from a Maine-based philanthropic foundation
- Dozens of one-on-one conversations in the Library explaining our new addition and how it would be used, with all of them having positive feedback, and the overwhelming majority of them being enthusiastically received.
- The ultimate public support, of course, will be approval of the CZA at a Town Meeting.

The following stories are from actual patrons who have used the library in the past few months. They clearly show the need for our proposed plans.

- A playwright and author whose parents are Casco full-time residents visits every summer and used the library as a work space to work on her novel so that she could meet her deadline.
- A psychiatrist who owns a summer property and has been summering in Casco all her life needed a space to hold a virtual private meeting somewhere with fast internet.
- A Raymond resident who is a remote worker had never been in our library but spent several hours on our wi-fi and was so appreciative of the space and internet that he sent in a donation for our building project when he heard about our plans for a dedicated quiet space.
- Patrons have used the library to complete certifications and take practice tests of many types: for military enrollment, secondary studies and professional licensing.

### **Future Public Engagement**

We are planning a public engagement event for Sunday September 28 to share our plans for expansion. The event will include music, food and outdoor activities for children and adults. Attendees will also have an opportunity to share their design ideas for the new outdoor spaces that will be created. All Casco addresses will receive a postcard invitation outlining the details of the event.

### **Contract Zoning Procedures**

As the Planning Board members are well aware, the Casco Public Library has appeared before the Board three times, as well as at the joint workshop between you and the Selectboard. At that time, the Selectboard voted to send the CZA application back to the Planning Board for reconsideration of subsection C. (3) (a) (also referred to as Step 3) as outlined in the contract zoning provisions in Section 215-3.4 of the Town's Zoning and Land Use Ordinance (ZLUO). Subsection C.3 (a) lists the five elements the Board is to consider during its review of any proposed Contract Zoning Agreement. These five criteria are:

- (1) Why is the Contract Zoning Agreement being requested
- (2) Is the proposed Contract Zoning Agreement compatible with the Comprehensive Plan
- (3) How does the proposed project or use of the property impact surrounding properties and the neighborhood in general
- (4) What are the benefits and costs to the Town of Casco and the interests, safety, and general welfare of its citizens
- (5) Input, when appropriate, from Town Boards and Committees

As the Planning Board is also aware, the next step in the process is a joint review of the proposed Contract Zoning Agreement by both the Planning Board and Selectboard per Section

215-3.4, subsection C (4) of Casco's ZLUO.

**Conclusion**

The Casco Public Library is confident that this narrative provides relevant information for the Planning Board's consideration to endorse taking the next step to keep the Contract Zoning Agreement process moving forward. Representatives of the Library will be pleased to clarify and/or answer questions at the upcoming Planning Board meeting on September 22, 2025.

In accordance with the next step of the joint Planning Board/Selectboard meeting, and eventually Town Meeting, it would be helpful if the Planning Board would provide specific input to the following questions:

- A. What are the concerns with or changes to the proposed Contract Zoning Agreement that the Planning Board would like to discuss?
- B. Is the proposed Contract Zoning Agreement compatible with the Comprehensive Plan?
- C. Does the proposed Contract Zoning Agreement meet the review criteria established in the Town's Zoning and Land Use Ordinance?
- D. Does the Planning Board support forwarding the proposed Contract Zoning Agreement to the next step of a joint Planning Board/Selectboard meeting?

We look forward to meeting with you at the September 22, 2025 Planning Board Meeting.