

NEW LIBRARY CAMPAIGN

THE KILTON PUBLIC LIBRARY COMMITTEE has its work cut out. West Lebanon's new library will cost an estimated \$5 million, and fund-raising began with about \$1 million left over from the bequest of James and Willena Kilton. There's a lot of money still to raise.

On the other hand, the committee has the key ingredient to many a successful capital campaign — an excellent plan that should excite considerable public interest in making it happen.

Just about anything would be an improvement over the barren lot that has marred downtown West Lebanon since Rite Aid razed a car dealership there and later abandoned plans to build a pharmacy on the 1.24 acre lot. But the design for the new library, the work of the Boston architectural firm Tappe Associates, promises to do more than just fill in what now is an eerily empty space. The new building seems likely to become a focus of civic activity in downtown West Lebanon, whose Main Street has managed to hold on to many of its local businesses and its distinctive character.

The primary function of the new building, of course, will be to provide a more spacious and updated library to replace the West Lebanon Library, a 4,000-square-foot building that is nearly a century old and defied any hope that it might be expanded. As now envisioned, the 15,000-square-foot Kilton Library includes a central browsing and reading room, a children's area, an outdoor reading garden and a reading porch with a view of the garden. (Architectural sketches can be viewed on the Internet at <http://library.lebcity.com/kilton/kiltonlibrary.htm>). It's a shame to abandon a handsome and historic building that has served the community well, but a light-filled, spacious and modern library represents a real improvement that will be worth the investment.

Like many libraries, Kilton will also serve as a community center. Plans now call for a playground outside the children's room and a community room that could be used for meetings or as a polling place.

In short, it shouldn't be difficult to make the case that this project holds great potential for adding to the city's store of civic assets. Focusing on a private fund-raising campaign makes sense in recognition of the many demands on the city's financial resources and in keeping with the spirit of the Kilton bequest that initiated the project.

Still, this is a project that cries out for a significant contribution from the city. Such a commitment would not only enhance the fund-raising campaign's chances of success, but also would signal the city government's appreciation for the role that this sort of facility plays in community life. When library trustees appear before the city council and make their pitch, councilors would serve the city and their constituents well by responding generously.