

OTHER LIBRARIES WORK GROUP REPORT

February 1997

The Other Libraries Work Group set out to learn from the hindsight of other library institutions who had been through, or were in the midst of a capital expansion project. Inquiries were made by a wide variety of us across a broad range of institutions.

Our primary role was to listen as we prompted our contacts with a list of basic questions. Whenever possible, our conversations were in person during a visit to their library. Initially, we focused our attention on local institutions visiting the libraries of Plymouth, Newton, Everett, Waltham, Arlington and Lincoln. As a result of those initial visits, a special fieldtrip was planned to several of those libraries for others in Cambridge who were interested as well as City Officials to benefit from seeing recent successful expansion projects.

The sampling was then expanded beyond local institutions to include others across the country that demographically bore some comparison to Cambridge, such as Berkeley, Evanston and Ann Arbor. The interest to learn from what other libraries were doing became contagious and resulted in a further expanded reach that would ultimately include numerous public libraries, large and small. The subject of some inquiries also expanded to include larger issues of the future of public library service in general.

In all instances we spoke with the librarians to learn something of their successes as well as from their mistakes. This report attempts to summarize the various messages heard, many heard consistently across the board.

Submitted separately as appendices to this report are the following: Appendix A - a list of questions many of us used; Appendix B - a simplified listing of common responses we heard; Appendix C - back-up notes that were submitted as the result of various inquiries; Appendix D - a variety of related materials gathered during the course of various site visits.

During the fall and winter of 1996 our committee visited local libraries which have benefited from recent additions in the towns of Newton, Everett, Waltham and Arlington. Individual members of the committee visited other libraries such as Plymouth and Lincoln, and have spoken with librarians in cities that bear some comparison to Cambridge, including Berkeley, Evanston and Ann Arbor. We have also talked to people at the libraries of San Francisco and San Antonio where notable new libraries have been built in recent years.

We admired the vast improvement in the traditional role of the library: plenty of books and a comfortable atmosphere in which to read and work. These libraries have large unfilled shelving

facilities, hopefully promising twenty years of growth for their collections. All of them have new, comfortable furniture and the majority had excellent lighting, both natural and artificial. Color and the quality of materials, especially wood and stone, helped to make the libraries a place of pleasure, safety and purpose.

All these libraries recognized the special needs of children, that new areas had to be scaled to suit them, flexible in layout and visible so parents and librarians could always see what was happening. Some of the libraries had special areas for young adults. All would have liked to have had such an area. The best we saw was in Waltham where they have also hired a young adult librarian.

Most of these libraries have made substantial addition to their meeting facilities. They are used for meetings, performances, readings and even for musical events. Some rent them out to local organizations. In Plymouth, the City Council now meets in the library with its over 200 seating capacity and far more handsome environment than their previous space.

All of the new building included small study rooms where 2 - 4 readers can work on joint projects. These have been very popular and now seem standard.

Libraries such as Newton, San Francisco, San Antonio that included food services find them a successful addition.

Computers are crucial. Almost all the librarians we spoke with regretted not planning for enough space to be given to computers. It is important to build a false floor so that wires are out of sight and that as technology changes so can the wiring of the machines.

The AV area is one of the most popular area in many of the new libraries. Must serve the public in many languages.

Most libraries in our region consider a local history room as an important service for the community.

Some innovative ideas included a "Friends' Rental Library," a program run by the Friends of the Waltham Library, by which they rent recent best sellers for a small fee to those patrons who do not want to wait for the library's one or two circulating copies. Also Newton's Art Gallery in a community where there is not enough space for artists to show their work gets high marks.

The advice from the various librarians included:

- Ease of access and clarity of plan as critical
- Attention to parking, quality lighting and security
- Air Conditioning is important
- We listen to the community in the planning stage, but implement our plans with professional, both architects and librarians

- We think about the staffing implications created by the increased user ship that is sure to come when the new building opens
- Survey non-users - Might hire a PR staff
- The library be coordinated with the school library system
- The master plan should balance expansion with provision for regular maintenance and occasional improvements
- Be sure to make plans for including the work of artist in the design process

How did these librarians criticize themselves as they looked back:

- They felt they were not ambitious enough - Should have made it bigger - this is a standard comment that comes from member of the communities
- They felt they were not open enough to new ideas
- They worried that they had let design dictate some services

SUMMARY:

All of these towns and cities find that the local sense of self and status has been raised significantly by building a new library. Mayors have said that when they leave office, it is the library they will point to as their major achievement.

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OTHER LIBRARIES WORK GROUP REPORT APPENDIX A

Guideline Questions Checklist for Other Public Library Visitations and Interviews

(Assumes recent expansion program has been completed.)

Generally, intent is to benefit from their hindsight regarding recent expansion :

- 1.) Library's role and services - function.
- 2.) Library's physical shape - form.
- 3.) Community's involvement - process.

What role does the Public Library play in your community?

What services are provided, and how were they determined?

Do you solicit community input regarding services? Formally or informally?

Which services are most used by your patrons?

Are there Branch Libraries in the system? What is their role and significance?

What form of Government does your community operate under?

What is the size of your community?

Relative wealth? Economic base? Ethnic diversity?

How was your expansion funded?

What is the impact of the University (if any) on your community?

On your Library?

How were the components of your expansion programmed?
By staff? By a professional?
Was it part of a Library System Master Plan?
Was there community participation? A public process? Formal or informal?
What was your approach to Children's Services?

What physical form did your Library services take in the new facility?
How did you plan for the unknown future of information technologies?
What were the best and worst parts of the design development process?
What were the best and worst parts of the construction process?
What were the most and the least successful aspects of your expansion?

How did various aspects of your Library compare before and after expansion?
Building size? Collection size? Staffing? Parking? Services provided?

What's on the horizon for Public Libraries in general?
What are the future roles and services of Public Libraries going to be?
How will the physical form of Public Libraries change in the future?
What hasn't changed and might be unlikely to change about Public Libraries?

Second Page Appendix A - N O T On-Line

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OTHER LIBRARIES WORK GROUP REPORT APPENDIX B

LESSONS WE HAVE LEARNED:
What Other Libraries Have Told Us

1. Beware the adequate - pursue the excellent.
2. If only we could have made it bigger. Especially: Children's, A/V, Meeting Facilities, and Group Studies.
3. Space needs were projected for twenty years, but we are filling up much faster.
4. Remember, you are the client. Be open to new ideas, however, don't let design dictate or diminish service.
5. Cambridge is unique - build a Library that can live up to, and uniquely serve its extraordinary community.
6. Ease of access and clarity of plan is critical and will encourage Library use.

7. Don't forget the basics: parking, quality lighting, security, and a quiet comfortable place to read or study.
8. Flexibility. Build raceways for a network of yet unknown technologies to locations not yet thought of.
9. We added by popular demand after the fact: Meeting Facilities and Food Services (they eat here anyway).
10. Listen to the community and plan /implement with professional expertise. Librarians and Planners are key.
11. Expect significant increase in user ship. There are staffing implications - when you build it, they will come.
12. Books are not being replaced by elect media. New formats mean new services, equip, space and staff.
13. Children's areas need to be flexible in layout, scaled to suit them, visible, and with their own check-out.
14. Video tape is another new format - less need to teach patrons how to use, but popular and space intensive.
15. Library's role continually evolves by staying in touch with community. Survey non-users. Hire PR staff.
16. New library role as community center requires evening hours access, food services, and meeting facilities.
17. Develop a role in support of local business. Also consider renting meeting spaces to local organizations.
18. Educational support for students requires coordination between School and Library Systems.
19. Commercial support services related to Library functions are being provided for near Library entry.
20. Provide collaborative study opportunities: dual work stations at terminals and small group study rooms.
21. Master plan should balance capital expansion, occasional improvements, and regular maintenance.
22. Public/private fundraising partnerships are becoming an important key to success.
23. Collaborate early with artists in the design process.
24. Involve the "Friends" by offering a best seller rental option for popular items.
25. In an ever-changing world, the Library must remain as equalizer, teacher, recreation, and civic heart.

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OTHER LIBRARIES WORK GROUP REPORT APPENDIX C

INDIVIDUAL BACK-UP NOTES FROM VARIOUS INQUIRIES
(Submitted in hard copy only and available on file with Library
21 Committee Records.)

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OTHER LIBRARIES WORK GROUP REPORT APPENDIX D

VARIETY OF MATERIALS GATHERED FROM VARIOUS OTHER LIBRARIES
(Submitted in hard copy only and available on file with Library
21 Committee Records.)