

## PRINCIPAL CHALLENGES OF CURRENT BUILDING

October 21, 2019 – rev. February 5, 2020

- I. CHILDREN’S LIBRARY and lack of designated spaces for Tweens and Teens.
  - a) Half below grade.
  - b) Lacks natural light.
  - c) Suffers from dampness and mold.
  - d) No ventilating system.
  - e) Too small: lacks appropriate and adequate spaces for preschoolers, elementary students, middle-schoolers, and teens.
  - f) Obstructed by fifteen heavy steel posts that support the floor above, but prevent staff and parents from observing children.
  - g) Shelves are so tightly stuffed that one book must be discarded to add another.
  - h) Seventeen steps from an unmonitored entrance
  
- II. UNRELIABLE, OUT-OF-COMPLIANCE, POORLY LOCATED ELEVATOR.
  - a) Ilsley needs a new, centrally located elevator that is within sight of the Circulation Desk.
  - b) A new elevator may not fit within the current elevator shaft.
  - c) Due to the unreliability of the elevator, the staff avoids using it.
  
- III. HVAC SYSTEMS.
  - a) The two failing heating systems -- steam and hot water -- need to be replaced.
  - b) Both rely on fossil fuel.
  - c) They do not heat or cool the building evenly.
  - d) There is no mechanical ventilating system which results in poor indoor air quality.
  - e) Ten unreliable AC units – 15 years old.
  - f) Many windows don’t work.
  
- IV. ENTRANCE AND EXITS:
  - a) Library entrances and exits should always be within sight of at least one member of the Library staff so that visitors can be welcomed and monitored when they enter and when they depart.
  - b) Elderly users and individuals with children in strollers have difficulty using either of Ilsley’s principal entrances – from Main Street and opposite the municipal building.
  - c) The Main Street entrance has 12 steps and a heavy door.
  - d) In the winter, the front entrance is not used, because it cannot be kept clear of snow and ice. That leaves only one functioning entrance to all of the library except the Community Room.
  - e) Seventy percent of visitors use the side entrance, which is out of sight of staff, cramped, and just 17 steps away from the children’s area.
  
- V. WATER LEAKAGE
  - a) The foundation of the original 1924 building leaks, causing water to seep into the basement, where the Children’s Library and Community Room are located.
  - b) To prevent this leakage, workers need unobstructed access to the exterior of the basement walls.

VI. INADEQUATE COMMUNITY ROOM

- a) Does the Town of Middlebury now have enough public meeting spaces to eliminate the need for Ilsley to provide one for non-library functions?
- b) Current Community Room hosts 12,000 persons a year, but turns away scores of others.
- c) Due to its low ceiling, there is insufficient height for full-sized images on the projection screen.
- d) Due to its flat floor, people seated in the middle and back have difficulty seeing presentations.
- e) The space cannot be divided into smaller units to allow more than one event to happen simultaneously.
- f) Entrance to the Community Room is rarely within sight of a member of the staff.
- g) Like the Children's Library the Community Room suffers from dampness.

VII. TOILETS

- a) Ilsley has just two public toilets, and they are in the basement. The fact that each accommodates only a single person leads to their being used inappropriately.
- b) Both toilets in are disrepair.
- c) Due the size of the building and the number of individuals in it, Ilsley should have at least six public toilets.

VIII. MCTV is currently located on the fourth floor, where there is only one means of egress, which violates state building codes.

IX. HOW WERE THESE CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED?

In January 2014, Ilsley trustee John Freidin and Selectboard Chair Dean George discussed the shortcomings of Ilsley's building. Dean suggested that the SB and Ilsley Trustees jointly create a committee to assess "space needs, especially for children, teens, and computer users of the Ilsley Library...[and] if the committee determines that solutions may include building additions, or other structure changes, requests for proposals (RFP) should be obtained from qualified professionals for preliminary design options, and cost estimates for future implementation."

- a) The committee was selected that month and consisted of two members of the Selectboard (Nick Artim and Susan Shashok, who was succeeded by Victor Nuovo); two Ilsley trustees (Maria Graham and John Freidin); and three community members (Dennis O'Brien, Christina Johnston, and Peter DeGraff, who was succeeded by John McLeod.) Town Manager Kathleen Ramsey and Library Director Kevin Unrath were non-voting members.
- b) The committee met approximately 30 times over three and a half years. All meetings were public and warned.
- c) The committee:
  - Reviewed population and pupil projections and consulted with public schools and Ilsley staff.
  - Studied what happens in Ilsley, finding that it is no longer merely a book repository. It now houses not only books, but video and audio discs; streams music and movies to members; teaches classes; offers computer instruction; hosts a broad variety of library and non-library programs for children and adults. It has become a hub for residents and visitors to read, relax, create, meet, explore topics that interest them, and learn.
  - Discovered that despite the digitization of many reading materials, Ilsley's book circulation has more than doubled since 1988. Furthermore, approximately half of Middlebury citizens lack

computers, Internet connection, or printers and depend on them to find employment, learn, and communicate, just as they formerly lacked books, newspapers, and periodicals.

- Learned that the library building has not been altered in 30 years.
- Held meetings with groups of seniors, elementary students, and teens to get their ideas.
- Studied the future and best practices of libraries.
- Talked with library consultants, historic preservationists, and town officials.
- Conducted a lengthy, community survey – via both the Internet and paper copies -- to gather ideas about the building. 300 persons completed surveys.
- Meanwhile, Trustees developed a new Long-Range Plan, which guided the building committee and its architects.
- Reviewed previous studies of Ilsley’s needs, which twelve years ago concluded that then the library needed 5,500 square feet of additional of space.
- Hired engineers to assess the building and its systems. Though physically sound, the building is so structurally inflexible that it is extremely difficult to re-configure. In addition, its heating, ventilating, cooling, electrical, technology, and plumbing systems are outdated or failing.
- Toured five recently renovated libraries: Essex Junction, Manchester, Montpelier, Rockingham, and Hanover.
- In 2016, sent Requests for Qualifications to 15 architectural firms; interviewed four; and selected Gossens Bachman Architects of Montpelier to develop preliminary design concepts.
- Hosted two packed public meetings:
  - i. At the first, local citizens toured the Children’s Library, entrances, heating plant, basement, Community Room, public computer space, and adult stacks, then completed questionnaires on the library’s most pressing needs, and broke into small groups for discussion and prioritization of deficiencies. The HVAC system and Children’s Library ranked at the top.
  - ii. The second, chaired by Ken Perine, focused on the recommended design concept. Gossens Bachman architects reviewed their recommendations, and participants asked them questions and offered suggestions.
- Tried to find a way to move the Children’s Library into the original building or 1988 addition, but failed. Because:
  - i. The 1988 addition is held together by elaborate steel trusses, placed between the rows of stacks on the second floor. The trusses support the ceiling of the floor below and the floor of the level above and make altering that space problematic and expensive.
  - ii. Each level of this addition is 800 square feet smaller than the already too small children’s area.
  - iii. The 1988 addition has very low ceilings that make upgrading the electrical and technological wiring, heating, ventilating, and cooling systems difficult and expensive.
  - iv. Even if the Children’s Library could be squeezed into the Community Room or even two floors of the adult stacks, there is no place to relocate either of them.

## X. OTHER FINDINGS:

- A. Ilsley Public Library is more heavily used -- 170,000 persons per year – than any other building in Addison County.
- B. Compared to all Vermont libraries with comparable budgets, Ilsley ranks first in visits, circulation, program attendance, and public computer usage. Nationally it ranks 59<sup>th</sup> of 1,395 comparable libraries.
- C. Ilsley is visually an anchor and highlight of Main Street. The quality of its educational, cultural, and recreational programs, facilities, accessibility, collections, instruction, and staff is essential to the vigor of the community and deeply affects its ability to attract and retain businesses and families.

- D. Ilsley consists of three pieces:
- a. The original structure (approximately 8,400 square feet) was built ninety-four years ago.
  - b. The 1977 addition, facing the new Municipal Building, has four levels, 2,200 square feet, and houses the elevator, a staircase serving all floors, two public restrooms, and a staff kitchen.
  - c. The 1988 addition contains stacks for the adult collection and videos, the Community Meeting Room, the computer area, and a reference room with a large bowed window, overlooking Main Street. This addition added approximately 8,600 square feet on three levels and brought the total square footage of Ilsley to 19,000 square feet.
- All the land owned by Ilsley consists of the footprint of the current building plus approximately 2,050 square feet of open space, bordering the movie theater to the north and the Main Street travel agency and nail salon to the west.
  - The entrances/exits to Ilsley pose liability issues. The front entrance is unsafe, especially during the winter; and the unmonitored side entrance is too close to the Children's Library.
  - The library lacks enough quiet spaces and small meeting rooms with adequate lighting, ventilation, power supplies, and Internet access.
  - Lighting throughout the building needs to be upgraded for effectiveness, efficiency, and reliability. Currently Ilsley must stock 18 different kinds of light bulbs to feed its fixtures.
  - Throughout the Library, storage areas are too few and too small.
  - A restored and modernized library will attract more users.
  - The shortage of parking close to Ilsley restricts access by the elderly and parents with young children.
  - If a building were constructed in the parking lot behind Ilsley, parking would be even more limited and less convenient.
  - Ilsley is a symbol of the vigor and ambition of Middlebury. It serves preschoolers to the oldest senior citizens. It is a hub for creativity, life-long learning, digital media, public meetings, and quiet relaxation.
  - Public libraries need to be structurally flexible so they can accommodate future needs. Ilsley is structurally rigid.

## XI. CONCLUSIONS

To fulfill its mission and meet the changing needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Ilsley must be renovated for safety, access, efficiency, flexibility, and the needs of children, teens, tweens, seniors, computer users, and staff. Approximately 6,600 square feet of additional space are needed. The computer area, Children's Library, and MCTV must be relocated. The Community Room should be larger, updated, and made flexible. Dedicated spaces for teens and tweens need to be created. Shelving in the stacks should be modified so all books can be reached by all patrons and built on rollers so they can be moved to make space for meetings.

Phased or partial improvements are unlikely to be successful, because for efficiency and functionality of each component of the library affects the remainder of the structure.

Working with its architects, the Library Building Committee evaluated three different concepts to renovate and increase space:

OPTION 1: Remove the 1977 addition, renovate both the original and 1988 structures, and build a three-level, 8,650-foot addition – connected to the existing building by a long hallway -- to the east (toward the rear parking area) of the 1988 wing. This addition would impinge slightly on parking. Estimated cost: \$8.4 million.

OPTION 2: Build a one or two-story, new library elsewhere in Middlebury – perhaps near high school, Mary Hogan School, the municipal gymnasium, or South Village. Estimated cost: \$12 million.

OPTION 3: Remove both the 1977 and 1988 additions, restore and renovate the 1924 structure, and build a connected addition of 14,400 feet. Estimated cost: approximately \$10 million.

*At its meeting on March 16, 2017, the Library Building Committee unanimously agreed that Option 3 was by far the wisest. Here are the principal reasons why:*

**Option 1** – the least expensive – would lack an accessible entry from Main Street; do little to reveal the beauty of the original building; require two elevators; consume some of Ilsley’s parking spaces; not increase ceiling heights in Community Room or elsewhere, and hide the entrance to the Community Room. It would look and feel like an add-on.

Option 2 -- By moving Ilsley out of downtown, Option 2 would alleviate the squeeze on downtown parking and be closer to the schools, municipal gym, and most residences. However, the committee did not want to diminish downtown and did not develop any idea of what to do with the existing building. This option would also be the most expensive and controversial.

**Option 3** -- allows the Children’s Library to be expanded and moved out of the damp basement into the sunlight. It enables the computer area, MCTV, and staff kitchen to be relocated into the basement, since none requires much natural light. It reveals the beauty of the 1924 building by removing the two additions that obscure from it. It creates an inviting, at-grade entrance from Main Street, thus reinforcing Ilsley’s downtown prominence. It adds an outdoor plaza and second at-grade entrance in the rear of the building. (Both that entrance and the one from Main Street would lead patrons to the circulation desk and thus assure that all who enter or leave the building are within sight of staff.) Option 3 also: (1) creates a new, larger, flexible, and naturally lit Community Room with proper wiring and ceiling height; (2) requires just one, centrally located elevator; and (3) retains all parking. It also provides a sunny, energy efficient, and flexible building; enables the continued usage of the fourth floor; and can support solar panels on its south-facing roof. For all these reasons, Option #3 is the most likely to attract public and private support.

## XII. LIBRARIES ARE MORE EXPENSIVE TO BUILD THAN OTHER PUBLIC BUILDINGS.

- a) Everyone on the building committee was surprised by the cost of the project, but nevertheless certain that partial or phased solutions would be “throwing good money after bad.”
- b) Although the building committee was not charged with investigating how to finance this project, it talked frequently about that. In general, it hoped that funds would come from: a town bond, a capital campaign, and support from foundations and grantmakers. We might get help from our Congressional delegation, but the days of “earmarks” are gone, and other federal sources are very modest.
- c)
- d) The next steps are to flesh out the design and undertake a feasibility study to assess the extent of private financial support for the project.