

# DRAFT Library Renovation/Expansion Working Group Report

11.11.2021

NOTE: This document is a working draft of tentative ideas being explored by the working group. It is not a finished product and has not been approved by the working group at this time. It is being made available to the public in the interest of transparency and in accordance with Vermont Open Meeting Law.

## Item A. Summary of the work done by the 2014-2017 Library Building Committee.

1. Process of the 2014-2017 Library Building Committee.
  - a. Reviewed previous studies of IIsley's needs
  - b. Reviewed a community analysis scan commissioned by IIsley Public Library Trustees to examine local demographics and trends including projections of local and school populations.
  - c. Engaged in self-education about library building trends by reading articles, viewing lectures, and touring five recently renovated libraries in the area.
  - d. Conferred with library consultants, historic preservation experts, and town officials.
  - e. Hired Engineering Services of Vermont to assess the building and its systems.
  - f. Conducted several surveys and requested public feedback by holding quick snap surveys; commissioning reports from staff; analyzing results of an online survey completed by 316 people; conducting several focus groups including with children, teens, and seniors; interviewing key members of the community; and hosting two very-well-attended meetings with the architects to share concepts and obtain community feedback. Held a total of 30 warned meetings.
  - g. Wrote up a RFQ and sent to 15 architectural firms. Narrowed list and interviewed four. Hired Gossens Bachman Architects of Montpelier and engaged with them in a design and feasibility study process.
  - h. Using community feedback, structural reports, and guidance from architects, outlined challenges and deficiencies in the existing building and attempted to address them in a new design.
  - i. Considered alternatives including building a new structure elsewhere in town and working within the confines of the existing additions. Recommended a design that would solve all of the major issues raised in the discovery process requiring the removal of the 1988 and the 1977 additions at an estimated cost of \$9.6 million.
2. Findings of the 2014-2017 Library Building Committee.
  - a. Summary of Building Deficiencies and Challenges
    - i. The original 1924 building leaks and causes moisture problems in the basement which houses the children's room and community meeting room.
    - ii. The at-grade entrance in the 1977 addition is cramped, uninviting, and not easily accessible. It is not visible from the circulation desks, and is nearby the children's room.
    - iii. The building has no accessible entrance from Main Street. The stairs leading up to the Main Street entrance are in disrepair and difficult to maintain during winter due to poor drainage. During the winter, this entrance is generally closed.
    - iv. The elevator is near end-of-life and does not meet current accessibility standards. It is unreliable and unwieldy.

- v. The library has only two readily available single-person public restrooms. They are isolated, out of lines of sight, in disrepair, and often used for inappropriate purposes.
- vi. The community meeting room cannot be reconfigured into multiple spaces that could be used for different sized events. Low ceilings prevent successful film screenings. The entrance is not within sight of a staff member.
- vii. Complex, rigid, cell like structural elements of the 1988 addition allow almost no flexibility for modifications of how services are delivered.
- viii. The mechanical system is antiquated and, in some cases, not working. The two failing steam and hot water heating systems do not heat the building evenly, rely on fossil fuel, and are near end of life. The ten unreliable AC units are almost 20 years old and failing.
- ix. There is no operating ventilation system, resulting in poor indoor air quality.
- x. The layout and lack of sightlines makes it difficult to monitor the library with current staffing.
- xi. Current shelving is inadequate, either in terms of overall space (the children's collection is overly cramped) or in terms of accessibility (shelving that is too high or too low pose challenges for patrons in wheelchairs or with other mobility issues).
- xii. The children's room is difficult to access with strollers, has poor sightlines (a major safety concern), is damp, has limited natural light, and is not large enough to accommodate the multiple age groups that use the space.
- xiii. Other than the garden, there is no exterior space for groups to assemble.
- xiv. The third floor of the building, which houses Middlebury Community Television, has only a single means of egress, in violation of current building codes (another major safety concern).

b. Summary of Design Priorities

- i. After a thorough program analysis, it was determined that the library needed an additional 6,630 square feet.
- ii. More dedicated spaces to serve children from preschool through high school, which should consist of four distinct, age-appropriate spaces that are unobstructed, well ventilated, safe, and naturally lit.
- iii. Safe, inviting at-grade entrances from Main Street and the rear parking area that are within sight of the circulation desk.
- iv. Efficient, reliable HVAC system to provide mechanical ventilation (there is none now) and to replace the hodge-podge of heating systems and ten failing A/C units.
  - v. Enhanced space for computers and digital instruction, including media lab.
  - vi. Modern, efficient elevator.
  - vii. Adequate, safe public restrooms.
- viii. Improved sightlines throughout the building, including sight of all entrances (including Community Meeting Room) and all restrooms.
- ix. Structurally flexible building to accommodate evolving programmatic developments.
- x. Larger community meeting room free of moisture problems, with high ceilings.
- xi. Modern and expanded wiring for technology throughout the building.
- xii. Improved, efficient lighting throughout the building.
- xiii. Stacks shelving should be no more than four feet high and should be on rollers.

- xiv. Assortment of spaces for quiet reading and small group meetings.
  - xv. Increased storage space and adequate staff work areas.
- c. Major Challenges
- i. In order to excavate the perimeter and waterproof the foundation of the leaking 1924 building, the 1988 and 1977 additions would have to be removed.
  - ii. The space for expansion is limited; the library is bounded on three sides by the town offices, Main Street, and the Marquis Cinema and expanding into the parking lot created a concern among citizens about reduced parking.
  - iii. The 1988 addition is inflexible because of large steel trusses that hold up the floors. The Library Building Committee determined that it was not possible to renovate the 1988 addition in such a way as to repurpose its space in a useful way.
  - iv. Building onto or renovating a historic building always creates added complexity and cost.
- d. Ultimate Recommendation
- i. The Library Building Committee recommended a design that called for removing the 1977 and 1988 additions (totaling approximately 10,500SF); renovating the original 1924 structure (totaling approximately 8,400SF); and constructing a three story new addition (totaling approximately 19,700SF) in the space between the 1924 building and the Marquis Cinema. This design, estimated at 9.6 million dollars, demonstrated that all of the above design priorities could be accomplished on the library's current plot.

**Item B: Summary of changes since the previous design plan was developed. What was learned from the process of the previous Library Building Committee? What should be approached differently this time around?**

1. Summary of Changes
- a) The pandemic has brought home the importance of flexible spaces with good air circulation and multiple handicap accessible entrances. Libraries in Vermont that were able to quickly reconfigure their spaces, manage the flow of patrons, and keep down the viral load with a highly-functioning HVAC system could open to the public sooner than Ilisley.
  - b) The pandemic pushed many library patrons who were previously uncomfortable with digital e-books and audiobooks to learn how to access these materials for the first time. As a result, the circulation of digital materials relative to physical materials increased dramatically. It is anticipated that many of these library patrons will continue using digital materials in the future. While physical materials are still, and will always be, the bedrock of the collection, the size of the physical circulating collection should be reassessed and the space devoted to collections reevaluated appropriately.
  - c) The pandemic demonstrated that internet access is not a luxury but a necessity, and underscored the digital divide in Vermont. The role rural libraries play as a source of free, reliable internet 24 hours a day is critical to the state's infrastructure. Accessing the library's wifi 24/7 can be difficult when the building is closed, especially during cold winter months.

- d) The Downtown Master Plan process was completed. There is now a document that outlines guiding principles for developing the downtown area. Any renovation/expansion project should carefully consider the downtown master plan. There may be creative ways the library can accomplish, or partner with other institutions to accomplish, several of the goals and recommendations outlined in the plan.
- e) The federal House and Senate Appropriations Committees brought back earmarks after a 10-year moratorium. The Jeudevine Memorial Library in Hardwick, Vermont has already benefited with an appropriation of \$600,000 to build a teen and children's room and make the library more accessible. This is a possible funding stream that should not exist before. Other grant and funding possibilities could be explored.
- f) The library heating system will hopefully be replaced in the summer of 2022. This may present an opportunity to approach the overall renovation/expansion as a phased project.
- g) Since 2017, Construction Costs have inflated along with the rest of our economy. Using 2017 as the 100 mark, current cost indices stand at 119.6, and are projected to reach 128.8 by 2023. \* Costs simply go up over time. If the \$9.6 million plan proposed by the Building Committee in 2017 was built today it would cost \$11.5 million. In addition, the cost of building materials has been subject to significant increases during the pandemic. Without knowing when supply chain issues and other pandemic related demand issues will resolve, it may be prudent to remember that cost estimates are still vital to the project's success and deserve our full attention. We should seek out competent, informed cost estimating resources who will establish contingencies for cost estimates in sync with current data and forecasts. \* Per Construction Analytics, E. Zarenski
- h) The behavioral changes of the pandemic might be long-lasting, and some patrons might be leery of spending time in confined spaces with other people far into the future. This could have design implications (outdoor spaces, open indoor spaces).
- i) In order to cover increasing demand for library services and programs, the library has added 1.5 FTE staff positions since 2017.

## 2. What was learned/should be done differently?

- a) The Library Building Committee did a tremendous amount of community engagement and received lots of feedback, but many community members still felt that they hadn't been 'a part of the process.' Future efforts should continue to solicit community engagement, but should also put additional effort into communicating with the public about these opportunities for engagement, the participation level, and the outcomes.  
Recommendations:
  - i) Retain someone whose specific job is to communicate the work of the committee to the public throughout the entire project (similar to the way Jim Gish communicated the downtown bridge project).
  - ii) Present multiple conceptual designs early in the process and solicit input from the community.
  - iii) Go out into the community and meet people where they are, as opposed to asking people to come to the library or municipal building to give input.
- b) The estimated cost of the final design was a shock to many community members.  
Recommendations:
  - i) Cost needs to be considered earlier in the process.

c) The charge to the Building Committee was very clear, but when their work was done the project 'fell flat.' Exploring sources of funding and raising public support needs to happen alongside the design work, to ensure the project is seen through to its completion.

Recommendations:

- i) Convene two additional groups, one devoted to funding and one devoted to community engagement, which will work alongside the Renovation/Expansion Team.
- ii) Ensure clear charges and lines of reporting for each of these groups.
- iii) Ensure consistent communication between these groups, perhaps through some overlapping membership.

**Item C: Recommended changes or refinements to the draft charge to the Design Team.**

1. See Appendix A, Draft Charge to Design Team.

**Item D. Recommended questions and considerations that the Design Team should explore as part of its process.**

1. Can the renovation/expansion be phased?
2. Is moving the building to a new location a feasible option? Why did the previous Building Committee decide *not* to move to a new location?
3. Is there any way to keep the additions?
4. What are the 'essentials' i.e. what does a renovated/expanded library absolutely have to have?
5. What is the cost to do nothing, i.e. how much does it cost to simply accomplish the necessary maintenance?
6. How should cost be considered? Is there a budget? How do we determine a budget?
7. What will the impact of different price points be on taxes?
8. Can the elevator be replaced within the space limits of the current 1977 addition?
9. Where will the library operate during construction? What will be the cost of moving and renting space?

**Controlled Vocabulary**

- The library's floors are referred to (in order from lowest to highest) as *ground floor; first floor; second floor; and third floor.*
- The *Building Committee* existed from 2014 to 2017, did extensive work on assessing building and community needs, and proposed a design plan in 2017.
- The *Working Group* was formed in August 2021, and is charged with providing a summary of the work done by the 2014–2017 Library Building Committee.