

## Field Guide to Evaluating Library Facilities: What to Look for in Visiting Library Buildings

An ideal library design is a useful combination of many related functions. It must optimize the ability for providing flexibility for changes over the life of the building. The building gives people a wide range of choices and services, and accommodates many different needs. General objectives for effective library design include:

- Universal access to all materials and services for all patrons.
- Easy to find collections, services and spaces.
- Efficient materials circulations designed for convenient public service.
- Efficient staff work areas to assure productivity.
- Flexibility for future changes in services and/or collections and/or demographics.

### **Principle Categories**

**Library Site Selection**—A site that encourages people to use the library is most important.

**User Convenience**—Can people get to the site quickly and conveniently?

- Near other activities, visible and directly accessible.
- Proximal to major transportation routes.

**Community Access**—Is the site in a useful location for the community?

- In geographic center.
- In population center.
- In future population center.
- Walking distance from a population concentration (one quarter mile).

**User and Staff Safety**—Will the site be safe and secure at night?

- Well-lighted areas.
- Active at night.
- Parking access (primarily non-urban sites).
- Easily observed by security personnel.

**Community Synergy**—Will other community groups benefit from the site?

- Near other evening community activities.
- Near schools and/or business.

**Future Growth**—Will the site accommodate library facilities in the future?

- Accommodates building.
- Accommodates future expansion.
- Accommodates parking (primarily non-urban sites).

**Cost Factors**—Will the site minimize cost?

- Purchase price.
- Site development cost: water, subsurface conditions, utilities.
- High community acceptance for public funding.
- Potential for private funding.
- State/federal grant potential.
- Minimizes staffing and operating costs.

## **Building Approach**

**Parking Considerations**—Can people navigate the parking lot and find room to park?

- Adequate parking with seasonal shade.
- Protected pathway to entrance.

**Entrance Considerations**—Can people orient themselves and find their way to the variety of library service functions as soon as they enter the building?

- Public service departments clearly visible upon entering.
- Lighted sign perpendicular to traffic showing hours open.

## **Finding and Using Information**

### **Browsing in New Materials**

The display of materials should emulate a successful bookstore. Although, this is evolving with increased digital content options, people will select a recent video, CD, an interesting book or audiobook from an attractive display.

- New materials covers presented prominently.
- Displayed materials are lighted and arranged for easy, convenient browsing.
- New materials displayed in a prominent location with ample circulation aisles.

**Getting help from a trained librarian to find locally held materials and/or access digital information.**

- Visible from the entrance, an experienced, well-trained librarian is available to assist users to select a useful book, get an answer to a question or learn how to search for digital content.
- Collaborative work stations for in-depth, assisted research are conveniently positioned for both access and privacy.

### **Finding Information on a Particular Subject**

- People can access information on a particular topic from a large collection of materials on a wide variety of subjects. The library's print collections are arranged in an easy-to-find sequence.
- End panels visible with line-of-sight signage in aisles for easy finding.
- Several computers distributed conveniently, including in stacks, for access to library catalog.
- A continuous pattern sequence for stacks that run parallel with the line of access and supervision.
- Signs showing both subjects and range of Dewey numbers.

## **User Spaces**

### **Quiet, Individual Study**

Users can find a quiet place in the library to read, study, and/or create using the available catalog, analog information, subscription databases, digital information, and/or the Internet.

- Comfortable, quite, easily supervised.
- Adequately heated and lighted learning spaces for long term use.
- Visually transparent, but acoustically isolated.

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### **Group Study & Tutoring**

People wanting to share information and study together, as well as with individual tutors, have access to acoustically isolated rooms in sufficient quantity for a wait of one hour or less.

- Distributed for use by every demographic.
- Variety of collaborative furniture arrangements.
- Information technology enhanced.
- Easily supervised.

### **Program Facilities**

People can attend a program or a meeting uninterrupted by the activities of the library.

- Voice amplification system for universal access.
- Potential after-hour access.
- Access to support services (toilets/storage/catering).

### **Children's Facilities**

Children's facilities need to be configured for programs, access to tangible and digital materials, noisy and quiet activities, and staff work. Children need to use the library in an inviting, safe ergonomically appropriate area.

- Appropriate scaled furnishings.
- Self-selection of pictures, books via face-out browser shelves.
- Spatial zones defined to encourage both active and quiet behaviors.
- Accommodations for children's programs.

### **Teen's Facilities**

- Young adult area acoustically separated for group activity.
- Character is inviting to the user.
- Able to supervise without seeming under surveillance.

### **Staff Work Spaces**

Library staff can monitor library activity and provide patron services with:

- Clear sight lines for staff supervision
- Work flow design with flexibility to adapt to change.
- Ergonomically designed staff work stations.
- Staff operated environment control systems
- Convenient locations for workrooms.