

Frequently asked questions regarding the Galesburg Public Library and a new library building

1. Why is the Galesburg Public Library Board of Trustees considering a new library?

The current building is crowded and lacks certain amenities that are in demand in the Galesburg community. The library is approximately one half the size of most libraries that serve communities of 30,000 plus residents. The square footage of a new library would be approximately 74,000 square feet.

The existing library was opened to the public in 1961, after a fire destroyed the Carnegie Library that stood on the same site. Damage from the fire was estimated at \$848,000, but insurance covered just \$240,000. Because the insurance money would not cover the damage, let alone the cost of a new building, the library had to look for outside sources of funding. The city's bonding capacity already had been exhausted by a \$5 million bond to pay for piping water from the Mississippi River to meet the city's growing needs. Galesburg residents voted against a \$650,000 referendum in 1959 that would have helped pay for the new building. The library board had to take out a low-interest loan. To save money on the building the library eliminated a full basement, reducing square footage for future storage. Corners were cut to save money for the new building.

To make up for the space deficiency the library has undergone three expansions. All three additions have been paid with loans financed with revenue from the library's regular operating budget.

2. What's wrong with the existing library?

In addition to the limited square footage of the library, there are a number of problems with the existing structure.

Structure

1. The second floor of the library is supported by shelving posts on the main floor, an extremely awkward, inflexible and insufficiently strong design. Consequently, the shelving on the first floor cannot be re-configured and library materials cannot be housed on the second floor due to weight constraints.
2. There is limited storage in the library. The majority of the storage is in the boiler room. Only non-flammable materials may be stored there.
3. The multiple-use parking lot south of the library belongs to the city and is too small. A library the size of Galesburg's needs 75 to 115 spaces, but the lot has only 46 spaces for all users. The parking lot is used by apartment dwellers, nearby office workers, and guests to Whiting Hall.

Security

1. The library has two public entrances, when the recommended number is one for adequate supervision. The south entrance opens into the non-fiction book collection and is not directly supervised by library staff. This poses security problems.
2. The adult non-fiction shelving aisles have dead ends. Wheelchair customers cannot turn around.
3. Some ceilings are so low that proper lighting installation is impossible.

Service and Programming

1. The main program room and the children's program room cannot be used when the library is closed. There is no kitchenette, water supply or storage closets. Because the children's program room doubles as a public meeting room, there is adult traffic in the department. The room is too large for story telling and has no closets for storing furniture or program supplies.
2. There is inadequate space for young adults. They share a small corner of the children's room area.
3. Much of the library's shelving is extremely overcrowded. As a result, many books are shelved too high above the floor and books must be weeded ruthlessly. Some aisles are so narrow that they violate state and national accessibility codes. Because the shelving posts are supporting the floor above, the aisles cannot be widened.
4. As the library's collection has grown, shelving has sometimes replaced tables. Seating in the adult services area consists of a cluster of tables in the center of the department. The library has no study rooms or family computer rooms.
5. The library needs more computer workstations but has no space for them without eliminating the remaining tables in the library where customers read, work, take exams, receive tutoring and use their own laptop computers.

3. Why doesn't the library board expand the existing library by adding a second floor?

The library fills its footprint on the current site. Because the library's site is small, creating substantially more floor space would require new construction at least two stories high. If a second story were added, it would require that the back part of the library be demolished where shelving posts hold up the existing second floor. Expansion would probably require demolishing the current building and starting over. There is interest in the purchase of the current building, which would provide additional revenue for construction. Parking would still be a problem for a larger library, since the existing lot is already too small.

4. Why not use a vacant store for a library?

Remodeling existing buildings is always tempting and sometimes successful. However, remodeling is almost always more expensive than one would expect, sometimes costing as much as new construction. In addition, few existing buildings meet the requirements for a library. The basic requirements of library buildings include extremely strong floors (far stronger than modern commercial spaces, including parking decks), ceilings a minimum of 10 feet high, adequate space above ceilings for mechanical equipment, large open spaces to allow individual departments to be in a single room, single public entrance for both pedestrians and drivers, networks of 110-volt and data supplies, restrooms that meet Illinois Plumbing Code requirements, level entrances and an absence of unessential steps. A good public library site is a good commercial site, and businesses find that being located close to a library is a major sales asset.

5. Why not move to the armory?

The library board examined the armory and learned that, even if a second floor were added, the total square footage of the Armory would be less than the square footage of the existing library. Nothing would be gained by the move.

6. Where do you plan to build the new library?

The library board at its regular monthly meeting held April 1, 2010, voted unanimously to select the 200 block of West Main Street (south side) as its first choice for the future site of a new Galesburg Public Library building.

7. Why did the library board hire an architect if a new library is not in the immediate future?

The library board is not trained to assess building sites; an architect is. Mark Misselhorn, an architect with APACE Design in Peoria, was hired by the board because he has experience evaluating potential library sites and designing new and remodeled libraries. Misselhorn is being assisted by local architect and engineer Bob Johnson from Metzger Johnson Architect, Inc. The site evaluations do not include any type of building design. The library board is being fiscally prudent by evaluating sites before making a long-term investment.

8. What can a new library offer that isn't already provided by the existing library and staff?

A new or expanded library will have a single public entrance for security, leading to a foyer that provides separate access to the library restrooms and meeting rooms, allowing them to be used when the rest of the library is closed. There will be comfortable places for people waiting for a city bus or to be picked up.

There will be a single lending desk serving all departments. There will be convenient places to return books, including a drive-up facility. Self-check units will be available for users who prefer to check out their own items. The used book area will be expanded.

The new or expanded library will provide a social area for exhibits and to help the library meet its increasingly important function as a community center. It will include self-service, coin-operated vending machines and wall and floor space for exhibits.

The adult services area will include a quiet reading room for citizens who want to read away from the noise of a busy modern library. There will be small study rooms for quiet study, group projects, study sessions, tutoring, small committee meetings, test taking and home schoolers. Family technology rooms will provide places for parents with small children to use computers without bothering other library users. A computer classroom will provide overflow computing space and an extra library meeting room. More computers will be added for customer use.

A young adult service area, with comfortable seating and a YA book and magazine collection, will be created. New housing for the library's Archives, which specializes in the history and genealogy of Knox County, will provide a secure reading room for researchers and a climate-controlled storeroom for the collection. Partnerships with historical and cultural organizations will be explored.

The children's area will have study rooms for tutoring, student projects, home schooling, game groups and literacy activities. The craft and story room will have space for a variety of programs and events, along with a counter and sink area. Family restrooms will make it unnecessary for children to use the main public restrooms.

A new or expanded library will have meeting rooms designed for library and community events. A community room will include a kitchenette, nearby restrooms, projection equipment and storage closets where all furniture and equipment not in use can be cleared away. A conference room for meetings will also include a small kitchenette and projection equipment.

9. Why did the library carpet the adult reading area, if a new library is planned?

A new library is three to five years from fruition. During a five-year period, over one million customers will use the library. The carpet in the main reading room had holes covered with duct tape and new snags formed every few days. The library board replaced the carpet in the reading area for the safety of customers and staff. When the library board markets the sale of the library, a future buyer will appreciate the new carpet, too.

10. Why not move various functions of the library to multiple facilities throughout Galesburg?

Decentralizing various library functions into separate geographically dispersed buildings would increase operational costs and staffing needs. It would also be inconvenient for families where young children, adolescents and adults have needs that could not be simultaneously met in the same library facility. Library departments do not function separately. For example, materials are processed for all departments from a central location and, for cost efficiencies, employees work in more than one department.

2008 Statistics for the Galesburg Public Library

- Total square footage of current library: 36,780
- 48% of Galesburg residents have a *current* Galesburg Public Library card
- 291,524 items were loaned to card holders (a 15% increase from 2007)
- 23,356 reference questions were answered by library staff (a 26% increase from 2007)
- 5385 items were borrowed by other Illinois libraries (a 239% increase from 2007)
- 205,230 people visited the library
- The library provides 37 computers for the public
- 16,000+ hours of public Internet time
- 5792 residents attended library programs

Value of libraries (Courtesy of the Wisconsin Library Association)

- Libraries are essential institutions in a democratic society because they play a non-partisan role in providing the information that allows citizens to make informed decisions.
- Libraries are essential to the educational process because they support curricula, teach information literacy, and foster critical thinking skills.
- Libraries are essential partners in creating educated communities because they provide opportunities for self-education, life-long learning, and self-improvement.
- Libraries are essential places of opportunity because they level the playing field making the world of information available to anyone seeking it.

Did you know that:

- U.S. libraries circulate about the same number of items as Fed Ex ships each day, i.e. about 5.3 million items.
- Research shows that libraries are busier during hard economic times.
- Five time more people visit U.S. public libraries each year than attend U.S. professional and college football, basketball, baseball and hockey games combined (1.1 billion vs. 204 million)
- The City of Chicago used public libraries as the anchors for neighborhood redevelopment. The Daley administration has used libraries as catalysts for changing neighborhoods. In fact Mayor Daley refers to the neighborhood library as the “heartbeat of the community.”
- According to *Money Magazine*, libraries have forms people need, information people need, and free Internet access for sending message. “Best of all, you have a bevy of free experts who can help you research whatever your issues are.”