

Executive Summary

Bennett Martin Public Library Space Needs & Facility Study

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bennett Martin Public Library has served the City of Lincoln well for forty years. It is a cultural anchor in downtown Lincoln and serves the needs of a diverse group of library users. Over the past several years, the role and services provided by public libraries have evolved considerably. Two major influences have driven this evolutionary process: technology and the impact of the retail mindset.

Libraries nationwide have shifted from being bland places where library users felt the need to whisper to vibrant, dynamic places providing access to a wide variety of services tailored to meet local needs. When the Bennett Martin Public Library opened its doors in December 1962, library users found a friendly staff and a large collection of books. There were also some audio-visual materials, such as records, 16mm films, slides and filmstrips. State of the art technology in 1962 meant that staff had access to manual typewriters and they used books, magazines and clipping files to answer reference questions. Library users located desired materials by checking the card catalog, and they checked out materials for home use by signing their names on cards located in book pockets inside each book.

Now, 40 years later, library users and library staff use computers to access the library catalog online, which is available 24 hours from any location that can access the Internet. The audio visual collection has expanded to include videos, compact disks, DVDs, and books on tape while obsolete or lesser used formats are no longer a part of the collection. Library users can use computers in the library to access electronic databases licensed by the library, locate information on the Internet, or even use word processing and other software for personal use. Of course, there is an even larger collection of books, magazines and newspapers.

The library services and library collections at the Bennett Martin Public Library have changed significantly over the past 40 years, but far less has changed to the facility itself. There were two additions to the facility, one in 1968 and another in 1978, which brought the building to its present size of 64,043 square feet. To the extent possible, the technological infrastructure to support the computer systems has been added. Maintenance has been performed to keep aging mechanical, electrical, heating and ventilation systems functioning, and to keep the building looking as clean and welcoming as possible.

Consequently, the time has come to examine the library service needs of Lincoln residents and ascertain whether or not the existing Bennett Martin Public Library can be remodeled or expanded to meet those needs, or if necessary to explore alternative sites and buildings to set the direction of a future main library to serve the community for the next 30 – 50 years.

To assist the Library Board, staff and consultants in developing options for a remodeled, expanded or new library, the opinions of community residents and the library staff were sought. During community meetings, focus groups and one-on-one interviews, participants were asked their opinions of the Bennett Martin Public Library building and the services the library does or could provide. The primary observations of the community residents and staff were as follows:

Location

The vast majority of community residents and staff believe it is important for the Bennett Martin Public Library to remain downtown. If a new library were to be built or an adaptive reuse undertaken, the participants in this process wanted to see the library remain very close to its existing location.

Accessibility

It was suggested that the hours of the library be extended, specifically participants wanted the library to open at 9 a.m. as it had previously.

Many of the participants commented on the lack of parking, which they believe has a negative impact on the use of the library. They believe the availability of additional parking should be a high priority in any discussion of expanding or relocating the library.

Other participants indicated it is important that the library be located on one or more major bus routes. While others thought it is important that it be easy and safe to reach the library on foot or by bicycle.

Numerous comments were made about the fact that you cannot take one elevator to every floor in the building.

Size

Many participants and almost all of the staff indicated that the existing library was too small. They described the library as being crowded, cramped, full, and cluttered.

Specific comments were made about the lack of space in the Youth Services area, the Internet area, the Heritage Room, the business reference area.

Staff were very vocal about the lack of work room space through out the building and the lack of office space. There is also a serious lack of storage space.

Architectural features and spaces

Many community residents and staff commented positively about the natural light in the building and indicated that they liked the courtyard.

While some participants described the building as beautiful and attractive; others described it as chaotic, dim, dreary and unexciting. It was described as utilitarian and outdated. They indicated that the building should be more welcoming. They wanted a building with meeting spaces, quiet study spaces and places where talking was not only permitted but encouraged. They envisioned a building with comfortable seating and lots of computers.

Many participants thought the addition of a coffee bar, used bookstore and or gift shop would make the library more of destination and would be welcome additions to the building. Many participants cited Barnes and Noble as the atmosphere that should be created.

Condition

The majority of the comments about the building were unfavorable. Some, such as dated décor and lack of signage and color, could be easily resolved if funds were available. Others, such as an old HVAC system, poor ventilation, slow elevators and small tacky restrooms would be much more difficult and expensive to resolve.

Collections and Services

Virtually every collection and service the library offered was appreciated and used by community residents. What they wanted could be summed up in two words: "More, please."

They wanted more books, audio – visual materials, computers, space, hours, and programs. Other than eliminating fines, they could not think of anything that the library should cease.

Although none of the questions posed in the community sessions asked their opinion about the library staff, at least one person in every community group made positive comments about the staff and the services they provided.

Visibility in the community

A number of community residents commented that the library needed to do more marketing. They felt that the library needs to publicize the services that are available and implement a campaign to increase usage.

Other

Comments were made on a wide variety of other topics ranging from advice that the Bennett Martin Public Library should not duplicate services provided by others to the fact that the role of the library has changed since the Bennett Martin Public Library opened.

A number of participants said that they were uncomfortable with the number of homeless people who are in the library, usually sitting in adult reference area. Participants said that this makes it hard to find a chair, especially at noon.

Although many of the comments about the building were critical or negative, it was clear that they were spoken as part of an honest desire to describe their vision of an even better library in downtown Lincoln. Participants love the branch libraries, but they do not consider them to be a substitute for a downtown Central library. They want a bigger library with larger collections and the capacity to offer enriched and additional services. The words of one participant seemed to summarize the thoughts of many others when he said, "Don't shoot short. We need a larger foot print to last for the next 50 years of growth."

Each participant in the process was also asked to review a list of thirteen library service responses that described what the Bennett Martin Public Library could do or offer to community residents in an effort to meet community needs. Each participant was asked to select the one service response that she or he considered to be the highest priority for the

Bennett Martin Public Library. Then each participant was asked to vote four more times for those service responses he or she considered as high priority.

The six service responses that were identified as being the highest priority for the Bennett Martin Public Library were, in alphabetical order:

COMMONS: A library that provides a COMMONS environment helps address the need of people to meet and interact with others in their community and to participate in public discourse about community issues.

CULTURAL AWARENESS: A library that offers CULTURAL AWARENESS service helps satisfy the desire of community residents to gain an understanding of their own cultural heritage and the cultural heritage of others.

CURRENT TOPICS & TITLES: A library that provides CURRENT TOPICS & TITLES helps to fulfill community residents' appetite for information about popular cultural and social trends and their desire for satisfying recreational experiences.

GENERAL INFORMATION: A library that offers GENERAL INFORMATION helps meet the need for information and answers to questions on a broad array of topics related to work, school, and personal life.

INFORMATION LITERACY: A library that provides INFORMATION LITERACY service helps address the need for skills related to finding, evaluating, and using information effectively.

LIFELONG LEARNING: A library that provides LIFELONG LEARNING service helps address the desire for self-directed personal growth and development opportunities.

The library staff also participated in a similar process in which their opinions of the existing Bennett Martin Public Library were sought. Staff were also asked to identify the service responses they believed were most appropriate to meet the library related needs of the Lincoln community. Their observations and suggestions were very similar to those identified by community residents.

While the community and staff were engaged in discussions about the existing facility and the services they most wanted the library to provide, a group of technical consultants were evaluating the structure and systems of the BMPL. The primary findings of those assessments were as follows:

Structural Considerations

Bennett Martin Public Library was completed in 1961, and incorporates additions constructed in 1967 and 1977. The building foundations are a deep system made up of drilled bell piers and the basement walls are poured concrete. The floor and roof structural framing systems are traditional steel post and beam with intermediate open web steel joists and are designed to accommodate library loading requirements.

Based on visual inspection, all structural elements appear to be in very good condition.

The building is not, however, designed to accommodate any further vertical expansion, nor will the courtyard perimeter walls support the insertion of floors into the courtyard without the addition of a new foundation and framing system for the inserted floors.

Electrical System Considerations

Electrical Service currently has two entrances into the building. Because most of the equipment is original and has almost no excess capacity, any significant remodel to BMPL should anticipate replacement of Electrical Service.

The electrical distribution system predominately consists of panel equipment that has exceeded an anticipated 30-35 year service life. In addition, much of the equipment was manufactured by a company that is no longer in business making it difficult to find replacement parts. Accordingly, any significant remodel to the Bennett Martin Public Library should anticipate replacement of the electrical distribution system. Any significant remodel to the Bennett Martin Public Library should anticipate replacing the lighting system to improve aesthetics, light quality, safety, security and energy efficiency.

The current Telecommunication System meets the building needs as best it can considering existing architectural limitations. It is reasonable to assume that, given the speed at which telecommunication equipment and transmission speed evolves, any remodel should anticipate a new telecommunication system.

Mechanical System Considerations

The Heating, Ventilating and Air Conditioning (HVAC) System consists predominately of equipment that has been used well beyond its average expected useful life. The system is also energy inefficient, utilizing steam heating instead of hot water, and self contained water cooled condensers which have high water costs. The HVAC System is at the point where major equipment replacement will need to happen just to maintain existing operating conditions. Any remodel project should anticipate the replacement of this entire system.

The Plumbing System is also predominately original equipment. However, the distribution system, with the exception of storm sewer service, seems adequate. All original plumbing fixtures should be replaced in any remodel project. The Bennett Martin Public Library needs to add a code compliant wet pipe fire sprinkler system.

Any significant construction project at the Bennett Martin Public Library should anticipate replacing most of the mechanical and electrical systems in the building. The existing structural system appears to be adequate for the existing floor plan configuration, but will not support either vertical or courtyard expansion without expensive structural system augmentation.

The library staff gathered data on the size of the existing library collections as well as the amount of shelving currently available to store those collections. They also gathered data on the number of tables, chairs, computer work stations and other equipment and furniture currently available for public and staff use. Once this information was gathered, they determined how much each of the collections as well as the furniture, shelving and other equipment would need to change to respond to the service responses that were identified as being the highest priority for the Bennett Martin Public Library. It is estimated that approximately 150,000 sq. ft. will be needed to meet the space related implications of the selected service responses. This information was then given to the architects and library consultant for review and use in developing the space related options for the library.

The architects and library consultant identified five (5) options for the Library Board and the Lincoln community to consider. For each of the options, this report identifies the amount of space the option would provide, how that space could be allocated to various library functions, the positive and negative outcomes of the option and the project cost in 2003 dollars.

Those five options and their associated size and cost are as follows:

Option 1: Remodel the existing Bennett Martin Public Library

Size: 64,000 sq. ft.

Cost: \$9,299,840

Option 2: Remodel the existing Bennett Martin Public Library and build a remote facility for designated administrative and support functions

Size: 89,268 sq. ft (64,000 sq. ft remodel and 25,268 sq. ft. remote)

Cost: \$14,470,974

Option 3: Remodel existing Bennett Martin Public Library and construct an adjacent addition

Size: 154,489 sq. ft. (64,000 sq. ft. remodel and 84,489 sq ft new usable space and 6,000 sq. ft. new unfinished basement)

Cost: \$29,310,463

Option 4: Adaptive reuse of an existing facility for use as a new library. (Please note: For this report, Pershing Event Center was selected by the consultants to illustrate how an existing facility could be transformed into a modern library. If the concept of adaptive reuse is of interest, then other existing facilities should also be considered for this purpose.)

Size: 147,139 sq. ft. (142,139 sq. ft. remodel and 5,000 sq. ft new floor inserted above stage.

Cost: \$22,727,980 plus cost, if any, to acquire the Pershing Event Center

Option 5: Build a new facility

5A: Build a new library on a “to be determined” site.

Size: 154,489 sq ft. (149,489 sq ft new space and 6,000 sq ft new unfinished basement)

Cost: \$32,926,017

5B: Build a new library on the site of the existing Bennett Martin Public Library and adjacent property after demolishing existing structures.

Size: 154,489 sq ft. (149,489 sq ft new space and 6,000 sq ft new unfinished basement)

Cost: \$33,202,454

5C: Build a new library on the site of the Pershing Event Center after demolishing the existing facility.

Size: 154,489 sq ft. (149,489 sq ft new space and 6,000 sq ft new unfinished basement)

Cost: \$31,826,017 plus the cost, if any, to acquire the Pershing Event Center

With unlimited funds, it would be possible to design a facility that meets every conceivable need, offers all the materials and services the public might want, and provides a sufficient number of highly trained and well compensated staff. However, funds are limited and thus the Library Board and Lincoln community residents face difficult choices. The consultants believe this report provides the background and framework for discussion as that dialog occurs in the months and years to come.

(A complete copy of the study, including space implications of selected service responses, space allocation, analysis of existing facility infrastructure, facility options, cost estimates for options, comparison of facility options, community and staff observations, technical reports and floor plans of existing building is available for review in the Reference Department of the Bennett Martin Public Library.)