

a report to the

Washington County Library System

Preliminary Directions for Facilities Planning

January 1, 2016



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WASHINGTON COUNTY LIBRARY

A Report on Preliminary Directions for Facilities Planning

Summary of Current Situation

The Washington County Library is a complicated system serving a large, diverse and geographically disparate population. The Library Department currently includes six branches, three express libraries and a law library. Of the six branches, three would be classified as regional, full-service facilities (Hardwood Creek, R. H. Stafford, and Park Grove). Two libraries are medium-sized facilities offering most services but are somewhat more restricted by space. (Wildwood and Oakdale), one library is small with limited services (Lakeland), and there is a small law library at the Government Center in Stillwater. The Library also has three express libraries in Hugo, Marine on St. Croix, and Newport, which are locker systems for pickup and drop-off of materials. The express libraries in Marine on St. Croix and Newport are also connected to small community libraries operated independently.

There also are two associate libraries in Washington County in Stillwater and Bayport, which receive some services from the County system and collaborate in a number of areas, but are funded and operated independently by their municipalities. Residents in those communities have full lending privileges in the County system and vice versa. The Stillwater Public Library would be considered a large branch, and Bayport a small branch in comparison to the libraries in the Washington County system. In addition to the independent associate libraries, there is also a small, independent library in Lake Elmo, which is not affiliated with the County system.

A significant portion of Washington County residents also regularly use the public libraries in surrounding counties and municipalities (the use of other libraries may be as high as 25%). Minnesota and metro area libraries have cooperative agreements which permit residents of one community to use other Minnesota and metro area libraries free of charge. Because a high percentage of Washington County residents work and shop outside the County, and significant portions of the population live in close proximity to Ramsey, Anoka, and Dakota counties and the city of Saint Paul, one would expect this trend to continue. In particular, in the community resident survey conducted as a part of this strategic planning process, the use of Ramsey County libraries by Washington County residents was notable and should be considered in

future planning. A few school districts in Washington County overlap with surrounding counties, which provides opportunities for use of other libraries. Thus, planning for facilities development in Washington County must factor in the use of other libraries and the fact that other libraries may be closer to, or easier to use, for many Washington County residents.

Given the current Library facilities, associate and community libraries, and availability of other public libraries in nearby counties, the population centers of the County are reasonably well-served in terms of library facilities and services. In other words, the great majority of the population of Washington County residents has access to a library facility near where they work or live.

However, with the population of the County expanding significantly, with demographic shifts, and the changing nature of library services, among other factors, the Washington County Library system needs to address current and long-term facility needs.

Facilities Recommendation

This report is part of a strategic planning process for the Washington County Library. In this process, facilities were examined in a number of ways and from various viewpoints. These include a brief look at each facility and usage patterns; comparison and benchmarking across the system to peer libraries and national library standards; examination of demographic, population trends and Met Council transit projections; and a host of forums for community input from across the County.

However, this process did **not** include a comprehensive look at current facilities, usage patterns by facility, or detailed community facility needs – that was beyond the scope of this strategic planning process. **Thus, Library Strategies' primary recommendation is for the Washington County Library to develop a comprehensive facilities plan for the system within the next 2-3 months.**

As part of the strategic planning process, and the variety of data and inputs collected, Library Strategies has identified that facilities are indeed a primary strategic direction and concern for the County. What is presented here, then, are factors and considerations for facilities development, and broad categories for the County to examine more closely in a facilities planning process. These recommendations for facilities planning should be considered a starting point for further community discussion, examination, study and consideration before embarking on a long-term facilities plan.

Overview of Planning for Library Facilities

Across the country, library facilities are being renovated and expanded to accommodate the new ways citizens are using libraries. Even as technology enables more research, reading and learning activities to occur on mobile platforms, libraries are becoming places to bring people together – places to use access to information to share and create new ideas. Now more than ever, libraries are providing the space needed to build connections and link various community assets. As John Palfrey states:

People are moving away from physical objects, by and large, as sources of discovery and information. But the need for human interaction – for humanity, in the broadest sense – has never been greater. Libraries can thrive at precisely this intersection.

Vibrant communities are continuing to build public libraries, but today, the choices around what type of facility or library is the right fit for a community is more challenging than ever. There is no one model for a public library. They vary tremendously in facilities, staffing, service models, collections, technology and, indeed in every aspect of operations.

The American Library Association has not set standards for public library facilities since the 1970s:

ALA no longer sets prescriptive standards for libraries in America. The reasons for this is that each library serves a different community with different needs. For example, a public library serving a community with many young families wants and needs a library with different facilities and services than a library serving a similar size population with a high percentage of empty-nesters and retirees. (ALA website page on facilities)

Minnesota does not currently have state standards for public libraries, and while many states, such as Wisconsin, do have standards, they tend to be broad or minimum standards that provide little guidance to a well-developed, sophisticated library system such as Washington County. Kentucky, for example, provides the following standards:

- 1. Library facilities are well-maintained.*
- 2. Buildings are conveniently located and accessible to all.*
- 3. The library is comfortable and efficient and provides a safe environment for users.*
- 4. The library is inviting to users.*
- 5. The library has external signage that identifies the facility as a library, and internal signage to facilitate use.*

Indeed, the Washington County Library clearly meets these standards, and would meet the standards of virtually all state minimums across the country.

Thus, the “standards” approach is not very helpful in facilities planning for Washington County. Similarly, while there are some benchmarks for library facilities development, the range of these benchmarks is large nationwide so that they only provide an initial starting point or reference at best. As the former Executive Director of the Toledo-Lucas County Public Library, Clyde Scoles recently commented:

While questions always arise about space requirements for public libraries, there is no magic formula or algorithm for how large a library should be. In our planning activities, we encounter individuals – even seasoned architects and planners with extensive experience building offices, commercial development or homes – who assume there is a definitive formula for determining library space needs. This is simply not the case.

So how does one move forward, if standards and benchmarks are not particularly useful? For public libraries, the approach has been to work within communities to achieve desired outcomes and then build services and facilities to address those very specific needs. This approach is first and foremost community-oriented, but also includes balancing a host of considerations, and options for the specific community or region served. For Washington County, the balancing act must account for the significant variation of communities within the service area, and thus it would be expected that library facilities will continue to be diverse and varied in the County to best serve local and County-wide needs.

Considerations in Planning Washington County Libraries

The Washington County Library system currently exceeds all minimum state standards. Additionally, in many areas, the Library meets or exceeds other minimum facilities or service benchmarks. Nonetheless, throughout the planning process, residents expressed needs or desires for new or enhanced facilities and services. Additionally, the County population is expected to grow significantly, as well as change in some profound ways demographically in the coming decades. Finally, the types of services at public libraries has changed enormously, and the possibilities for new or different offerings at the Washington County Library is expected to grow as well. Thus, the County has opportunities to make informed choices about the future of library service to positively affect the lives of residents.

What is presented here, then, are considerations for Washington County as it moves into planning for facilities development. Some of these factors are generic to all public libraries, including reference to some standards or benchmarks, while others are more specific to Washington County. The latter are based on findings from the strategic planning process, including Library Strategies consultants' cursory assessment of the Library's facilities.

Here is a list of factors for consideration in the facilities planning process for Washington County:

FACILITIES ARE TOOLS, NOT OUTCOMES – Public libraries should be designed to address community needs or aspirations. Simply put, libraries should either be helping communities make a needed change, and/or providing an enhancement to enrich the quality of life in a community. Facilities should be planned around the need(s) to be address or the enrichment value for the community.

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT BUILDINGS – The core cost centers for libraries are staff, collections, and facilities (and to some degree technology). While this has always been true, the trend in library services today is toward areas like outreach, programming, and training/education, as well as much more robust digital and website access (many libraries consider their websites as a separate branch). Facilities are still needed for gathering, training, and yes, collections, but the spaces are looking different, and the need for staff and operational support is greater than ever for vibrant, well-used public libraries.

SERVICE EQUITY FOR ALL RESIDENTS – A goal for all large library systems is to provide equitable service for all residents in its service area. This is challenging, because communities or neighborhoods vary so the types of service should differ, but the level of service opportunity should be comparable or parallel. An analogy would be if parents have two daughters and one is pursuing ballet and the other ice hockey, the parents would support them in differing ways but attempt to help them comparably. In short, the library should strive to provide comparably meaningful service opportunities to all residents. This goal is challenging for Washington County as the communities within the County vary considerably and their needs for service also differ. There is no perfect answer to this balancing act, but in planning facilities, the County will need to develop a plan that attempts to fulfill this goal of equitable service.

THE LIBRARY SYSTEM AS A WHOLE – For a large system like Washington County, which is also surrounded by available public libraries in other locales, no facility or service should be looked at in isolation. The totality of the system should be considered, and services not offered at one location may be balanced by an offering at a nearby location.

COORDINATION AND COOPERATION WITH SURROUNDING LIBRARY SYSTEMS – Currently for Washington County, there appears to be significant use of Ramsey County libraries (White Bear Lake, Maplewood, Roseville, etc.) in the northwestern section of the County. Similarly, there may be significant overlap with Dakota County libraries in the southern section of the County (i.e., Pleasant Hill Library in Hastings). Washington County residents may be using these libraries because they are closest to their home, are near where they work or go to school or shop, or offer more attractive services. Facilities planning should definitely incorporate these surrounding library options for residents.

COOPERATION WITH ASSOCIATED AND COMMUNITY LIBRARIES – In parallel to library service in other counties used by residents, a notable percentage of Washington County residents are served by associated libraries in Stillwater and Bayport and community libraries in Marine-on-St. Croix and Newport (and a community library in Lake Elmo, which is outside the County's taxing district). For the old, historic, associated libraries in Stillwater and Bayport, which pre-date the creation of the County system, the communities provide substantial local funding and resources to operate the libraries, but they also collaborate with the County on various services. This arrangement mitigates the need for the County system to provide separate facilities in the associated and community library communities, and generally enhances service in these communities and the County as a whole. In short, it currently is a positive partnership for the associated and affiliated community libraries. That said, as the County and these communities change, the collaborative agreements between and among these independent entities will need to be periodically examined – which may affect future facilities decisions.

THE CONDITION OF CURRENT FACILITIES – A driving factor can be the current state of a library facility. How old is it? Is it in good physical condition? Is it safe and accessible for patrons and employees? Can it be renovated cost-effectively? Can it be expanded for appropriate use? Is there a better location? And, there are a number of additional considerations and questions regarding a particular site. Based on input from staff and residents, and a very brief visual assessment of each library, it appears that the Oakdale, R.H. Stafford, Park Grove, Wildwood, and Lakeland libraries in particular should receive further examination regarding condition or age (although as part of a facilities plan, every library facility should be examined closely.)

THE AREA TO BE SERVED – Of vital importance is to look at the primary service area for the facility and determine the community needs, demographics and wishes, both currently and in the future. For example, a community with a large senior population might focus library service on collections, quiet space, and programs/lifelong learning, whereas as community with a strong population of young families would build interactive early literacy spaces, dynamic children's and teen areas, and flexible meeting areas. Once again, the outcomes should be addressed, and the tools to achieve outcomes for the community may, or may not, involve facilities.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE – Facilities require funding, not only for bricks and mortar, but *more importantly* for operational funding that allows the facility to remain open and offering service. A great facility open only a few hours is unlikely to serve residents well, whereas an acceptable facility open greater hours may be more likely to provide superior service. Determining long-term public and private support can be the critical factor in advancing a facilities project.

QUALITY AND LEVEL OF SERVICE – Because libraries today offer such a diverse range of offerings and services, determining quality of service can be difficult. Is customer service most highly valued or a large, easy-to-checkout collection? Or both? What are residents expecting and what do they have for comparison. Because Washington County residents are mobile and a high percentage use other metro area libraries, there may be expectations by some residents for Washington County Library services, hours and facilities to match or even exceed peer libraries in the region.

NEED FOR ENHANCED SERVICES – In the strategic planning process, a number of community needs for increased or enhanced services that may affect facilities planning emerged. Particularly, these needs included increasing services for seniors, especially for training, programmatic and learning activities; enhanced spaces for programming, training, and meetings; newer or more innovative spaces for teens; flexible spaces for use by workers, small business owners, and self-employed individuals; and outreach to under-resourced households, and families with small children. These expressed needs have many system ramifications, but definitely point toward the need for more flexible, meeting/training type spaces across the system, as well as possible exploration of larger, enhanced teen spaces in at least some facilities.

PROJECTED USE, AND TYPE OF USE, BY TARGETED POPULATIONS – This is a difficult issue faced by many libraries. Different populations use libraries at different rates, and use different services at varying rates. For instance, women and highly educated individuals tend to use libraries at higher rates than the general population, particularly for traditional services such as check out of books. On the other hand, outreach services, workforce development, or strong cultural programs may be needed and may have significant impacts on the households and individuals in particular communities. While full-service libraries have some offerings, such as strong collections, that may be used by the majority of communities within an area, determining the need to target the service needs of particular populations, particularly underserved communities, may be a critical factor in planning facilities and services.

POPULATION DENSITY AND POPULATION GROWTH – In attempting to serve the greatest number of people, libraries should be placed near population centers. A big factor, as most buildings are constructed for at least a 20-year lifespan, is to examine population trends and to build where the population centers will be in the future. While anecdotal, it is said that great libraries serve 90 percent of the people 90 percent of the time. Thus, public libraries need to focus on placement in population centers, whereas residents living in more rural or sparsely populated areas of the County may expect to travel further to their nearest library, as they would for various other commercial services. Another aspect of looking at population is the size of the library. Generally, the larger the population, the larger the library needed to adequately serve community needs.

USE OF SPACE WITHIN LIBRARY FACILITIES – Within the libraries, division of space for collections, adult reading areas, children’s or teen areas, programs and meeting spaces, staff areas, etc. typically emerges in the planning process as service needs and building programs are determined. There are no useful formulas for division of space within libraries, and change is happening quickly such that recent trends have focused on building highly flexible space that can be changed easily and cost-effectively as needs change.

AVOIDING DUPLICATION OF OTHER COMMUNITY RESOURCES – Because public libraries today are so diverse in their service offerings, both facilities and service planning must look at other community resources. As an example, for library facilities, planning should look at other resources or venues for teens within a service area before embarking on building expanded teen rooms or centers in a library. Similarly, many communities have a multitude of meeting rooms that are under-utilized, such that the need to build these types of facilities in a library may be lessened. For the latter, however, it should be noted that “gathering spaces” in libraries usually encompass multiple uses and types of rooms to accommodate such things as community meetings, library meetings, library programs for all ages that are related to collections, children’s story times, training and educational activities, technology for remote access, and tutoring or small work or study spaces. Thus, the need for flexible, multi-purpose, on-site “gathering spaces” at public libraries is often compelling.

EASY ACCESS FOR ALL, OR FOR PARTICULAR AUDIENCES – While the majority of residents in a locale like Washington County may have access to cars or other transportation, for a significant, and often under-resourced, segment of the population, it may be important to locate libraries on public transportation lines or hubs. Similarly, if a community library is targeting a particular population, such as teens, it is vital to assess how that population will travel to the library. Coordination of public transit options should be a factor in siting of new construction of public libraries.

TRAVEL TIME TO THE LIBRARY – In concert with placing libraries near population centers, studies have shown that the closer a library is to a person’s home, the more likely an individual is to use it. A reasonable benchmark is that most households will not regularly use a library if it is more than 15 minutes from one’s home. Thus, successful libraries are usually placed near population centers and/or other high traffic areas, such as business, commercial or shopping districts. Washington County does have areas, such as the northeastern and southeastern sectors, that have relatively sparse populations compared to the larger communities in the County. These areas are also not expected to grow significantly in terms of population. Rather than drive time for these locations, factors such as the nearest larger commercial districts that these residents use may determine library placement.

WORK AND EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS – How the majority of a population works or how they travel to work can impact the type, size, and location of libraries. For instance, a large percentage of Washington County residents do not work in the County, so locating libraries on well-traveled transportation corridors for ease of access before or after work is a likely consideration.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – Public libraries, particularly large libraries, often attract hundreds of people to a location daily. In general, most people, make more than one stop when running errands, and some communities have used new libraries to stimulate new growth and economic development in an area or region. More broadly, some communities have marketed new libraries as a community amenity, alongside good schools and parks, to attract new businesses or developments to the area.

TYPE OF SERVICE MODEL AND LIBRARY – There is no one model for public libraries today, and there are multiple service models and types of facilities that can match community needs most effectively. For example, Washington County currently has at least four different service models of libraries in the County. That said, a simple juxtaposition is whether to build one large, regional, full-service library or multiple small, community-oriented libraries. There are advantages and disadvantages to both models. The large libraries are usually more efficient and cost-effective, can provide a much broader range of services, and typically have longer hours. Smaller, community-based libraries are better able to meet specific community needs, and build stronger attachments and sometimes per capita use. For the diversity of Washington County, one would expect to have multiple service models, as currently exists, to serve the population well. Thus a mix of large, regional libraries; medium size area libraries; smaller community libraries; express locker-type libraries; and perhaps some newer, innovative models, may best fit the make-up of the County system in the future.

MULTI-USE FACILITIES AND LIBRARIES – Library research does not show a clear direction of pros or cons for building libraries in multi-use facilities or in partnership with other entities. It is successful in some cases, and less so in others, depending on the community and service needs. Nonetheless, placing libraries in multi-purpose centers, or in partnership with other organizations has been a strong trend in libraries in recent decades. Common types of these facilities are combining libraries with other government service centers, with park or recreational facilities, with housing developments, or in business or market centers. The R.H. Stafford and Hardwood Creek libraries are excellent examples of these types of libraries.

COMBINING PUBLIC AND SCHOOL LIBRARY FACILITIES – A special category of public libraries in multi-use facilities are joint public and school libraries. While broad and deep cooperation between schools and public libraries is desired, and can be highly successful on many fronts, these types of joint facilities have proven more difficult. According to a 2000 article in *School Library Media Research*, positives for a joint public/school library may include: a broader collection, longer hours, better trained staff, better use of the building at lower cost, and closer relationship among parents, schoolchildren and librarians. However, the negatives are more extensive, and include: inconvenience for public patrons of a library in a school setting, difficulty in promoting the library as a public library, inadequate collections to serve a diverse set of user groups, inadequate training for staff to serve in the dual role, difficulties with dual administrative and governance structures, school and public library service areas that are not contiguous, and security and privacy issues. The article found that joint public/school libraries were most likely to be successful in small communities of under 5,000 population, where resource sharing was necessary and diversity of access was less of an issue. While worth exploring, with the large and growing population of Washington County and the complexity of the school districts within the County, joint facilities may be a less successful approach than other types of school collaborations for the Library.

INNOVATIVE, NON-TRADITIONAL MODELS – Many different types of library service models have emerged for libraries in recent years. A common example, present in three locations in Washington County, are the use of express locker systems for delivery of materials. But other innovative library models also exist, such as 24/7 self-service libraries, small libraries focused only on one or two services (such as children’s services or technology), and technology-only libraries. As with express libraries, Washington County’s diversity of communities may lead it to exploring the use of other creative and innovative facilities trends in public libraries.

SIZE OF FACILITY AND USE OF SPACE WITHIN LIBRARIES – Although not absolutes, an accepted benchmark for libraries based on the *Kentucky Public Library Standards* (a common national standard) is that facilities should have at least .6 square foot of space per capita, with excellent libraries having 1.5 to 2 square feet of space per capita. Currently, the Washington County Library would need to add approximately 30,000 square feet in the County to meet that basic standard.

CURRENT:

2013 Washington County Library service area population: 204,310
(not including Stillwater, Bayport, and Lake Elmo)

Total current library facility square footage at .41 sq. ft. per resident: 83,604 sq. ft.

Total square footage needed to achieve .6 sq. ft. per resident: 122,600 sq. ft.
(40,000 sq. ft. increase)

Total square footage needed to achieve 1 sq. ft. per resident: 204,310 sq. ft.
(121,000 sq. ft. increase)

Total square footage needed to achieve 1.5 sq. ft. per resident: 306,465 sq. ft.
(223,000 sq. ft. increase)

Based on project population increases, by 2040 the Library may need to add as much as 94,000 square feet of space to meet the .6 sq. foot standard for adequate service and significantly more to achieve higher standards.

2040 PROJECTIONS:

Washington County Library service area population expected in 2040: 294,810
(not including Stillwater and Lake Elmo – does include Bayport)

Total square footage needed at current .41 level: 121,000 sq. ft.
(38,000 sq. ft. increase)

Total square footage needed to achieve .6 sq. ft. per resident: 177,000 sq. ft.
(94,000 sq. ft. increase)

Total square footage needed to achieve 1.0 sq. ft. per resident: 295,000 sq. ft.
(212,000 sq. ft. increase)

Total square footage needed to achieve 1.5 sq. ft. per resident: 442,000 sq. ft.
(359,000 sq. ft. increase)

Conclusion

Determining the expansion or improvement of facilities in a library system is a balancing act among many factors, which also change over time. Thus, a comprehensive facilities plan, which is updated at least every 5 years, is recommended for a large system such as Washington County.

For the strategic planning process, Library Strategies examined all of these areas, and the findings in the first section of the separate strategic planning report outline many of the directions that may impact building and facilities decisions. These findings, combined with knowledge of other library systems, building projects and various trends contribute to the recommendation that the Washington County Library look at the following factors as most critical in forming a facilities plan:

- **Community needs and aspirations for library service**
- **Operational resources**
- **The current condition of Library facilities**
- **Current location of facilities in the County system as well as associated, community and other metro area libraries.**
- **Projected population growth by area**
- **The totality of the Library system and provision of service to all residents**

Assessment of these critical factors, in addition to the other considerations listed above, will assist the County in providing balanced, good Library service for the majority of residents. Library/County leadership will ultimately spearhead decision making, but using the strategic planning process as a starting point, followed by additional staff, community, and expert input on facilities, will ensure that a plan is created that provides for County libraries that are cost-effective, meet community needs, and help the County continue to be “a great place to live, work and play ...today and tomorrow.”