

Lessons Learned: Mission Branch Renovation, 1996-1999

Needs: Earthquake structuring, handicap accessibility, modernization (separate computer room, etc)

Three funding sources with separate needs and requirements (i.e. State grant determined number of displayed volumes and patron chairs)

Desires: retain integrity of Carnegie structure; enhance the main reading room; improve Children's Library with a dedicated bathroom; create more staff workspace and storage area

Neighborhoods priorities: "traditional" library space, more seating and rejected Community room.

Library on a slope: it was decided early (by whom?) that the leveling costs were too high to keep costs within budget.

Results: Miracle that we have as much as we have: that it was actually done and the reading room is one of the most beautiful of all the highly utilized spaces in the city.

Entryway: Lost proportionally designed, impressive front on 24th. Now, old Children's Library entrance on Bartlett Street is hard to find, "penal institution" style, through security shield into cramped processing area, narrow two-level corridor that everyone has to pass through.

Stairway: As beautiful as it was, it had narrow treads, slippery and ate up too much space: result—advantage to lose it.

Present stairway: Rough cement looks like service stairway, hidden, impossible to clean; narrow; slippery on rainy days.

Elevator: Built out at the back of the building (the only added space) the elevator still required valuable inside space; it's inconvenient because it has to serve three levels, patrons and staff and opens on two sides. It jumps and jerks. Its placement determined the subsequent plans.

Traffic flow: Everyone has to pass through a little over three-foot-wide corridor; then it's unclear where anything is. It's only after much negotiation and considerable effort that you can reach the lofty, spacious reading room.

Children's library is still too small for its uses, hidden behind a closed door in the very back corridor. Its low ceiling makes it look smaller and more cramped than it is. It looks out at the area still without a gate that attracts crackheads and homeless. Police are called about once every day. Major problem.

Bathrooms: Old: One unisex public located off reading room.

Staff: separate; women's three stalls; men's 1 stall, 2 urinals

Now: One public; one staff, one added children's, all unisex .

Result: Public keyed unisex located downstairs: "monitoring a single public bathroom for adults in a busy location is time-consuming and stressful for staff"; Addition of children's bathroom "helps somewhat." Single unisex staff is a logistics problem: staff has to leave post and, if bathroom is occupied, decide to wait or come back.

Dedicated computer area: serves a needed public service but is hard to maintain and schedule for the staff (Timeout software ordered for 2003)

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Storage: New closets are extremely small and very difficult to work with—too narrow; doors and pillars interfere with usable storage area.

Office space: Better than before but still inadequate for a "Service" branch with more demands than a regular branch.

Furnishings: chose floor firsts, then much later table and shelf ends: trouble

Relocation: An expensive nightmare: weeding; expensive, small-spaced facility in problematic building: windows couldn't be opened, magnificent view: unpopular with everybody.

Present needs: community room, water source on second level (janitorial); heating system doesn't work; flooding at entrance and checkout areas; stairs are dirty and dangerous.

Staff input but detail decisions were Branch librarian and the representative from Public Works (who had control over budget and engineering). Building program: all preliminary planning (capacity and services) done solely by branch manager, Chief of Branches with community input. The plans evolved into more and more elaborate plans until real architectural floor plans evolved with coordination with DPW. Architect was charged with efficiency and cost effectiveness.

Vision: Needed Charrette desperately. The space needs were almost insurmountable from the beginning. Only room to grow: eight or so feet on either side of building that could have been used. Need was so great it blinded people about the real problems. Result is general vilification in spite of the real gains that were made by the improvements.