

FUTURE PLANNING AT THE ROCKPORT PUBLIC LIBRARY

Long range planning and goal setting are an important part of any healthy organization. The Rockport Public Library has evolved tremendously since it was founded with 1000 volumes in a corner of the Opera House. This phase of future planning began in earnest 10 years ago, when then-Director Sally Regan noted that our library's success – evidenced by rising attendance and circulation – was starting to tax our space.

Meeting the growing, changing needs of our entire community requires open-minded creativity. This timeline records the many steps and considerations that have brought us to this point.

2003: Library Director identifies achievements, needs

In preparation for the Town's Comprehensive Plan, then Library Director Sally Regan summarizes FY 2001 statistics, noting that Rockport Public Library's performance ranked near the top of the 64 libraries serving communities of 2,500 to 4,999:

3rd in annual circulation (62,535)

2nd in circulation per capita (19.49)

2nd in weekly hours open (53.5)

Annual circulation is the best indicator of a library's activity (better than population). Compared to the 12 Maine libraries with annual circulations of 50,000 to 70,000, Rockport ranks:

4th of 12 in annual circulation; **62,535**; average: 60,368

9th of 12 in space in existing building: **3,324 sq. ft.**; average: 8,017

11th in FTE's (full time equivalent staffing): **2.63**; average 6.

Given the fact that Rockport accomplishes its work with a comparatively small building and small staff, the report identifies long-term needs for increased shelf space, programming space, computer workspace, and parking.

November 2004: [Town of Rockport Comprehensive Plan](#) endorses future planning

Approved by voters in November 2004, the Town's Comprehensive Plan summarizes Library current usage and long-term needs, and charges the Library Committee, Selectmen, and Town Manager with weighing cost and benefits of:

expanding the library building and creating more parking at its current historic location in Rockport Village. The present building is widely admired for its architecture and landscaping. Zoning and traffic issues will need to be addressed.

-OR-

constructing a new facility on one of Rockport's major routes. In a larger, more centrally located, conveniently accessible public space, Rockport residents could meet, interact and build the bonds of community.

October 2008: Preliminary assessment of expansion potential on current and neighboring sites

At the request of Library Director Molly Larson, Town Planner Tom Ford evaluates the existing library site for possible expansion. He reports his understanding of the site restrictions and describes the "radical approach" of covering Lily Pond Stream. He indicates that it would require review, approval, and permitting from the Maine Department of Environmental Protection.

At the Library Committee's request, he also evaluates the potential for expansion on an adjacent residential site, which was then available for sale. The planner indicates that the property would present "substantial development constraints" and would be challenging to utilize.

April 2009: SWOT study assesses Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

Library staff and Library Committee members participate in a SWOT assessment to identify the Library's internal strengths and weaknesses, and to identify the external opportunities and threats that might affect it. Though they brainstorm separately, both groups identify the staff and director as strengths and name space and building concerns as a weakness. Both groups see strong community partnerships and collaborations as an opportunity, and view the economic downturn as a threat.

January 2009: Library Committee engages outside experts

The Library Committee agrees to engage the services of outside experts, inviting a consultant who has experience in helping libraries assess their needs for space and the engineering firm Gartley & Dorsky to assess current space and potential for expansion. The library consultant reports that the library holds approximately 10,000 volumes more than the space can reasonably accommodate. The Committee also agrees to visit libraries that have gone through a similar process in recent years.

September 2010: RES Committee asks Library Committee to submit proposal

In response to [a letter from Rockport citizens](#) suggesting a library complex on the Rockport Elementary School site, the RES ad-hoc committee asks the Library Committee to submit a proposal for a new library in that location. The Library Committee determines that it would be premature to submit a proposal before a thorough future planning process, and states "we have not yet determined that a new library building is necessary or desirable."

October 2010: Library receives "[Discovering the Possibilities](#)" grant

Library Director Molly Larson writes and receives a \$15,000 grant from the Davis Family Foundation to study future planning possibilities. The grant outlines three phases: determining current attitudes about the library through targeted focus groups and surveys; assessing the possibility of expansion on the current site; and developing a conceptual plan for a new library on another site.

November 2010: Discovering the Possibilities: Phase 1 includes focus groups and surveys

[Focus Groups](#): A total of 30 library users (about 1% of Rockport's population) participate in focus groups. The groups describe the library as cozy, homey, comfortable, intimate and welcoming and express their preference for the current library even with its space limitations.

[Survey](#): A total of 233 library users (including 160 Rockport residents, or 4.8% of Rockport's population) complete surveys. Most are regular library users, with 68% visiting at least once a week. More than half identify space for parking, groups, and staff as "limited" or "very limited." When offered three options (stay, expand, move), most respondents prefer to expand onsite. If expansion is not possible, 57% prefer to stay as-is; 43% prefer to move.

February 2011: Discovering the Possibilities: Phase 2 includes assessment of current site

Gartley & Dorsky completes an evaluation of the current library site, including a [topographic survey](#), setback requirements, lot coverage allowances, and shore land protection restrictions.

The [site plan](#) identifies one area of possible expansion: the handicapped parking space and some of the nearby gardens.

In a 2013 report summarizing the findings, Gartley & Dorsky recognizes the complicated interplay of Town ordinances and the shore land zoning restrictions required by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. The report also summarizes the possibility that diverting Lily Pond Stream through a culvert might change the zoning status, and notes that such a project would require DEP review, approval, and permitting.

Finally, the report notes that a full assessment of the site would also require assessment of structural capacity, HVAC, energy efficiency, and life safety.

April 2011: Library Director compiles usage statistics

Library Director Molly Larson compiles [usage, circulation, and attendance statistics](#) as part of the Davis Family Foundation grant. Visits to the library doubled between 1993, when the last library addition was completed, and 2010. The number of programs skyrocketed from 65 to 329, interlibrary loan and reference requests showed significant growth, and Internet usage (nonexistent in 1993) spiked.

The Director recommends that future planning considerations also include library trends; present and projected demographics of Rockport and surrounding communities we serve; economic conditions; and taxpayer support for existing and future staffing needs.

April 2012: Select Board receives [Statement of Need](#)

As part of the ongoing future planning process, Library Director presents a State of Need to the Select Board. The report observes that it is increasingly difficult (and nearly impossible in some cases) to serve the community in our current configuration, and identifies key areas of concern: *Inadequate interior space for patrons.* The library's layout makes it difficult to separate lively programs (mah-jong, story time, etc.) from quiet reading spaces. Children's story times are crowded, and there is a waiting list for the after-school reading program. Young adults and teens have a single small area in the center of the library. There is no private meeting space.

Inadequate space for collections. Even with one book weeded for every book added to the collection, the library utilizes shelf-tops, putting many books out of reach of many users. Interlibrary loan vastly increases the number available materials, yet there is no space to handle incoming and outgoing crates of books.

Inadequate space for programs. The library holds most larger programs at the Opera House, but cannot provide small, private meeting spaces. Holding programs off-site presents a number of challenges: the facility is not always available and must be booked far in advance; staff must transport equipment and materials; programs do not bring patrons into the library; children must cross an increasingly busy and complex intersection to get to a program; and staffing is inefficient and potentially unsafe, as staff members are alone in multiple sites.

Inadequate facilities. An average of 100 people use the library each day, and there are often lines (especially during children's programs) for the one, unisex bathroom. Staff space, material storage, and room for technology are limited. Increasing use of computer services requires a dedicated space for servers, equipment maintenance, and testing. There is no source of water other than the bathroom sink.

Inadequate parking. Most of the community competes for the few available parking spaces, which are in great demand, especially when another local organization is hosting an event. Some of the available spaces require crossing an increasingly busy and complex intersection, creating a safety issue and logistical challenge, especially for parents of young children. One handicapped parking space (the driveway) does not always serve the needs of visitors.

The report recommends: "the community should explore the possibility of a new library at RES or another location, or consider an expansion on the existing site, provided enough parking spaces can be developed to serve the needs of visitors and provided DEP regulations" can be met.

November 2012: Town Attorney reviews [Library Deed](#)

Mary Louise Curtis Bok donated the land to the east and west of Limerock Street to Rockport in 1943, specifically for the purpose of a library. A clause in her will specifies that the land would revert to the family if it were no longer used for a library. Since the Town owns the library building itself, the fate of the site is complicated. After Town attorney William L. Plouffe of Drummond/Woodsum reviews the deed, Library Committee members speak to descendants of Mary Louis Curtis Bok who live locally. They are only a few of the extended family, though, and all would have to be contacted if the town votes to build a new library on a different site.

November 2012: Discovering the Possibilities: Phase 3 includes conceptual design of new library

Library Director Molly Larson extends a [Request for Qualifications](#) (RFQ) for Architectural Design and Planning Services for a Conceptual Design for a possible new library to be situated on the old Rockport Elementary School East site. Nine architects submit applications, and an ad-hoc committee consisting of members of the Library Committee, Friends of the Rockport Public Library, town departments, town committees, and Rockport citizens selects four to interview. The group selects [Scott Simons Architects](#) of Portland to complete the conceptual design stage.

February – March 2013: Architects develop conceptual design for possible new library

Library Director Molly Larson and Scott Simons Architects [document existing square footage](#) for each of the library's "programs" (or services) and determine the square footage required to meet current needs. The proposal also incorporates circulation and library trends. A [space analysis diagram](#) compares current and proposed spaces.

After a series of meetings with the ad-hoc committee, the architects present two schematic designs at a [well-attended community meeting](#). A DVD of the meeting is available at the Library. The architects incorporate community input into a [conceptual design](#) for a new library on the RES site. The 14,000 square foot design offers maximum functionality, with a central circulation desk that welcomes entering patrons and offers clear site lines throughout the building to minimize the need for additional staff. There is a large meeting room that can be closed off from the rest of the library for evening meetings access (and rental possibilities), space for socializing, periodicals, and public computing, and expanded, more spacious stacks. There are also distinct, separate areas for teens and children, and a door from the children's area to an outside playground and garden. *This is only a possible design*; if the town votes to approve a new library, there will be an RFQ for Architectural Services and the selected architect will develop a final design with community input.

Construction costs, including the "soft" costs of furnishings and moving expenses, are estimated to be \$3-5 million. A portion would go out to bond, but *as much as one-half to two-thirds would be raised through fundraising activities, matching grants, and private donations*. The town appraiser offers the rough estimate that a 20-year, \$3 million bond would add 17.5 cents to the mil rate, or: "On a \$200,000 home that means an additional \$35."

Operating costs are carefully considered in the design process. The committee recommends building the most energy-efficient library possible in order to control operating costs and open up numerous grants and fundraising options. The committee recommends a structure that maximizes site lines to minimize the number of staffing requirements, and rejects the idea of a second story to avoid the need for additional staff and the expense and maintenance of an elevator (which would be required by the Americans with Disabilities Act and state statutes).

May 2013: [Library Committee Endorses New Library](#)

Based on the information obtained from the three phases of the Davis Family Foundation grant, the Library Committee votes to endorse the construction of a new library on the RES site. It is not the Committee's decision; it is simply a recommendation based on years of study.

May 2013: Friends of the Rockport Public Library express their neutrality

The Friends express their neutrality on the location of the library and state, "We will continue to support the library wherever it is located."

July 2013: Town Planner clarifies restrictions on current site

Given the confusion over zoning, setback, and environmental restrictions on the current library site, Town Planner Bill Najpauer reviews all relevant statutes, consults with DEP, and presents a report at a joint workshop with the Select Board and the Library Committee.

July 2013: Select Board and Library Committee hold joint workshop to establish next steps