

Report of Library Building Committee - March 21, 2017  
John Freidin, Chair

I am immensely proud and happy to make this report. The members of the Library Building Committee have been as diligent and thorough as imaginable. They have met nearly every month for three years; listened to countless Middlebury citizens from elementary students to seniors; have visited other libraries; read numerous articles about the future of libraries and library design; heard from national and local experts; watched videos; painstakingly selected an architectural firm; and always, always kept the needs and concerns of our town at the forefront. They all deserve our thanks.

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Three years ago, the Selectboard and Ilsley Trustees established a seven-person Library Building Committee to assess the Library's space needs, especially for children, teens, and computer users, and to obtain preliminary design options and cost estimates for necessary renovations or additions.

The following report summarizes the committee's findings and conclusions:

FINDINGS

- Ilsley Public Library is an architectural gem and highlight of Middlebury.
- Compared to all Vermont libraries with comparable budgets, Ilsley ranks first in visits, circulation, program attendance, and public computer usage. Nationally it ranks 59<sup>th</sup> of 1,395. Every year 170,000 persons enter Ilsley.
- Ilsley is made up of three pieces. The original 1923 structure. The 1977 addition, which faces the new Municipal Building, and consists mostly of a high-maintenance elevator and staircase. And the 1988 addition, containing the community meeting room, adult stacks, adult computer area, and a reference room, facing Main Street.
- There has been no architectural change to Ilsley in 30 years.
- The entire structure is structurally sound, but has significant limitations and problems.
- The 1923 building has been modified many times, hiding much of its beauty. Leaks from its foundation penetrate the children's area and the community room, both of which are below grade. The perimeter of this structure needs to be excavated and waterproofed.
- In addition to moisture issues, the children's library has little natural light; is cramped; lacks clear lines of sight to enable staff and parents to see the children;

and is located steps from an unobserved entrance and exit. The children's library should be moved out of the basement and requires more space for pre-literate children, staff workspace, and storage. And there is NO space dedicated to the needs of teens or tweens. Every library we visited had wonderful areas for both of these age groups.

- Access to Ilsley is unwelcoming, unsafe, and poses serious liability issues. All patrons of any library should enter and exit within sight of the staff. Ilsley has three entrances, but only the Main Street entrance is within sight of staff. Many seniors and adults with infants cannot climb the stairs to that entrance. 70% of Ilsley's patrons enter through the side entrance in the 1977 addition. It is far-removed from staff and steps from the children's library.
- Contemporary libraries are designed to be flexible in order to accommodate multiple uses and future changes. The 1977 and 1998 additions are "cell like." Their fixed walls and stacks, low ceilings, and omnipresent support posts make reconfiguration difficult and expensive.
- Ilsley has no mechanical ventilating system, which state law requires if a major renovation is undertaken. The building has ten, problematic A/C units, a boiler at the end of its life, and two heating systems (steam and dry duct) that continually need maintenance. Windows throughout the building cannot be readily opened, are inadequately insulated, and in many cases have rotted sills.
- Despite the digitization of some reading materials, demand for library services is growing. Many local citizens cannot afford computers, Internet service, or a printer. Although Ilsley may have to store fewer books, it must supply audio and video discs, computers, Internet access, printers, digital instruction and assistance, and streaming. These offerings are simply the contemporary version of Ilsley's original mission to provide free access to books, newspapers, and periodicals. While Ilsley has an adequate number of public computers for adults, they accommodate only a single user at a time, and are located where they interfere with other patrons. They should be relocated and reconfigured.
- The community room hosts 12,000 users a year for library and non-library meetings and is so heavily scheduled that it cannot accommodate many requests for its use. It is half below grade and lacks any natural light. Its entrance is out of sight of the staff. Its ceiling is so low that video and cinematic material cannot be shown effectively. Technological wiring in the room is out-of-date.
- Ilsley has only two public restrooms, both in the basement level. Each accommodates just a single user, which enables nefarious uses and vandalism. They should be reconfigured. The library also needs restrooms on the upper floors.

- Signage throughout the building needs updating to meet ADA guidelines and be more helpful to patrons.
- Ilsley lacks sufficient quiet spaces for silent study.
- It needs to be re-wired for technology.
- Lighting throughout the building should be upgraded for effectiveness, efficiency, and reliability.
- A renovated and modernized library will attract more users. However, a shortage of parking already compromises access, especially by the elderly and parents with young children. If a building were constructed in the parking lot behind Ilsley, parking would become even more limited.

## CONCLUSIONS

Ilsley offers superb educational and recreational programs for all members of the greater Middlebury community -- from preschoolers to the oldest senior citizens. It is their hub for creativity, life-long learning, digital media, public meetings, and quiet relaxation. The library is staffed by excellent professionals and countless volunteers.

However, the condition, configuration, and size of the building are unacceptable, unsafe, and pose serious liability questions.

The Library Building Committee concludes that there are no acceptable ad hoc solutions to the Ilsley's spatial needs. To fulfill its mission and meet the dynamic, fast-changing needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Ilsley needs approximately 6600 square feet of additional space and must be thoroughly renovated for safety, access, flexibility, heating, cooling, and ventilation.

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The Library Building Committee focused on three options to renovate and increase space:

Option #1: Remove the 1977 addition, renovate both the 1923 and 1988 structures, and build a three-level, 8650 foot addition to the east of the '88 wing. Estimated cost: approximately \$8.4 million.

Option #2: Build a one or two-story new library elsewhere in town – perhaps near Mary Hogan School, the new gymnasium, or South Village. Estimated cost: approximately \$12 million plus the cost of land and site development.

Option #3: Remove both the 1977 and 1988 additions, restore and renovate the original structure, and build a connected addition of 14,400 feet. Estimated cost:

approximately \$10 million.

For comparison purposes:

- If the interior were renovated, but no square footage was added -- the entrances left unchanged, the building's flexibility not enhanced, and its ceilings left low -- the cost would be approximately \$3.9 million.
- If no renovation, restoration, or expansion were done -- leaving untouched the existing entrances, elevator, interior, and exterior --and only the prevention of leakage and the installation of a new HVAC system were accomplished, the cost would be approximately \$1 million.

On March 16, the Library Building Committee unanimously agreed that Option #3 was by far the wisest.

Why chose Option #3 rather than #1 or #2:

- A. Option #1 -- the least expensive -- fails to address access from Main Street; would not enhance the beauty or prominence of the original building; requires two elevators; consumes parking spaces; does not increase ceiling heights; and hides the entrance to the community room. A long hallway would separate it from the existing building and look like an inorganic add-on.
- B. Option #2 -- moving Ilsley out of downtown -- would alleviate the squeeze on downtown parking and be within easier walking distance of schools and most residences. However, there was no enthusiasm for such a move; no idea of what to do with the existing building; no expectation that this option could save the town money; and no desire to divert the library's 170,000 annual users away from downtown.
- C. Option #3
  1. Allows the children's library to be expanded and moved out of the basement into the sunlight.
  2. Provides appropriate new spaces for teens and tweens.
  3. Relocates the adult computer area and MCTV to the basement, which they prefer.
  4. Accentuates the architecture of the 1923 building by removing the additions that detract from it and restoring its interior.
  5. Creates a welcoming, at-grade entrance from Main Street, thus reinforcing Ilsley's downtown prominence.
  6. Adds an outdoor plaza and second at-grade entrance in the rear of the building. (Both that entrance and the one facing Main Street would lead patrons to the circulation desk and thus assure that all who enter or leave the building are within sight of staff.)
  7. Creates a larger, naturally lit community room with proper wiring and ceiling

- height.
8. Requires just one, centrally located elevator.
  9. Enables the continued usage of the fourth floor.
  10. Retains all parking.
  11. Provides a flexible building flooded with sunlight.

For all of these reasons, Option #3 also seems most likely to attract significant donor support.

In conclusion, the quality of Ilsley Library is fundamental to the health of our community and deeply affects its ability to attract and retain businesses and families. The Library Building Committee is unanimously enthusiastic about this proposal. We hope you will agree.

Everyone on the committee was surprised by the cost of this project, but was nevertheless convinced that lesser solutions would be “throwing good money after bad.” The library staff is examining the preliminary floor plan with the goal of reducing its size. And the committee hopes it can decrease the cost of Option #3 by ten percent or more.

Although the building committee was not charged with investigating how to finance this project, it talked frequently about that. Its hope is that funds will come from three sources: a capital campaign, a town bond, and support from foundations and other non-profits. We may get some help from our Congressional delegation, but the days of “earmarks” are gone, and other federal sources are very modest.

The next steps are for the committee to refine the preliminary design and for the Ilsley Trustees to assess the extent of private financial support for the project.