

# **Ilsley Public Library Renovation/Expansion Working Group Report**

## **To the Middlebury Selectboard**

January 13, 2022

This report was prepared by a working group appointed by the Selectboard of the Town of Middlebury. The work was conducted between October 14, 2021 and January 13, 2022. The working group was composed of Dan Brown and Lindsey Fuentes-George from the Selectboard; Joe McVeigh and Amy Mincher from the Ilsley Public Library Board of Trustees; Dana Hart, Ilsley Public Library Director; and Judith Harris, Town Staff Liaison.

A website containing the minutes of all of the meetings of the group as well as a document repository can be found at: <https://www.ilslleypubliclibrary.org/about-us/renovation-expansion-working-group/> The repository includes the key documents used by the working group as well as an archive of documents produced and used by the 2014-2017 Library Building Committee.

### **A. Summary of the work done by the 2014-2017 Library Building Committee.**

- 1. Process of the 2014-2017 Library Building Committee.**
  - a. Reviewed previous studies of Ilsley's needs.
  - b. Reviewed a community analysis scan commissioned by Ilsley Public Library Trustees to examine local demographics and trends including projections of local and school populations.
  - c. Engaged in self-education about library building trends by reading articles, viewing lectures, and touring five recently renovated libraries in the area.
  - d. Conferred with library consultants, historic preservation experts, and town officials.
  - e. Hired Engineering Services of Vermont to assess the building and its systems.
  - f. Conducted several surveys and requested public feedback by holding quick snap surveys; commissioning reports from staff; analyzing results of an online survey completed by 316 people; conducting several focus groups including with children, teens, and seniors; interviewing key members of the community; and hosting two well-attended meetings with the architects to share concepts and obtain community feedback. Held a total of 30 warned meetings.
  - g. Wrote up a RFQ and sent to 15 architectural firms. Narrowed list and issued RFP. Interviewed four architectural firms. Hired Gossens Bachman Architects of Montpelier and engaged with them in a design and feasibility study process.
  - h. Using community feedback, structural reports, and guidance from architects, outlined challenges and deficiencies in the existing building and attempted to address them in a new design.
  - i. Considered alternatives including building a new structure elsewhere in town and working within the confines of the existing additions. Recommended a design that would solve all of the major issues raised in the discovery process requiring the removal of the 1988 and the 1977 additions at an estimated cost of \$9.6 million.

**2. Findings of the 2014-2017 Library Building Committee.**

**a. Summary of Building Deficiencies and Challenges**

1. The original 1924 building leaks and causes moisture problems in the basement which houses the Children's Room and Community Meeting Room.
2. The at-grade entrance in the 1977 addition is cramped, uninviting, and not easily accessible. It is not visible from the circulation desks, and is nearby the Children's Room, which is a safety concern.
3. The building has no accessible entrance from Main Street. The stairs leading up to the Main Street entrance are in disrepair and difficult to maintain during winter due to poor drainage. During the winter, this entrance is generally closed.
4. The elevator is near end-of-life and does not meet current accessibility standards. It is unreliable and inaccessible.
5. The library has only two readily available single-person public restrooms. They are isolated, out of lines of sight, in disrepair, and often used for inappropriate purposes.
6. The Community Meeting Room cannot be reconfigured into multiple spaces that could be used for different sized events. Low ceilings prevent successful film screenings. The entrance is not within sight of a staff member.
7. Complex, rigid, cell like structural elements of the 1988 addition allow almost no flexibility for modifications of how services are delivered.
8. The mechanical systems are antiquated and, in some cases, not working. The two failing steam and hot water heating systems do not heat the building evenly, rely on fossil fuel, and are near end of life. The ten unreliable AC units are almost 20 years old and failing (note: these units are AC only, not heat pumps).
9. There is no operating ventilation system, resulting in poor indoor air quality.
10. The layout and lack of sightlines makes it difficult to monitor the library with current staffing.
11. Current shelving is inadequate, either in terms of overall space (the children's collection is overly cramped) or in terms of accessibility (shelving that is too high or too low poses challenges for patrons in wheelchairs or with other mobility issues).
12. The Children's Room is difficult to access with strollers, has poor sightlines (a major safety concern), is damp, has limited natural light, and is not large enough to accommodate the multiple age groups that use the space.
13. Other than the garden, there is no exterior space for groups to assemble.
14. The third floor of the building, which houses Middlebury Community Television, has only a single means of egress, in violation of current building codes (another major safety concern).
15. Current staff workspaces and storage spaces are inadequate.

**b. Summary of Design Priorities**

1. A thorough analysis determined that an additional 6,630 square feet was needed to support library operations.

2. More dedicated spaces to serve children from preschool through high school, which should consist of four distinct, age-appropriate spaces that are unobstructed, well ventilated, safe, and naturally lit.
3. Safe, inviting at-grade entrances from Main Street and the rear parking area that are within sight of the circulation desk.
4. Efficient, reliable HVAC system to provide mechanical ventilation (there is none now) and to replace the hodge-podge of heating systems and ten failing AC units.
5. Enhanced space for computers and digital instruction, including a media lab.
6. Modern, efficient elevator.
7. Adequate, safe public restrooms.
8. Improved sightlines throughout the building. All non-emergency entrance/exits (including Community Meeting Room) and public restrooms must be in view of a circulation desk.
9. Structurally flexible building to accommodate evolving programmatic developments.
10. Larger Community Meeting Room free of moisture problems, with high ceilings.
11. Modern and expanded wiring for technology throughout the building.
12. Improved, efficient lighting throughout the building.
13. Shelving for books should be no more than four feet high and should be on rollers to provide better sightlines and flexible use of space.
14. Assortment of spaces for quiet reading and small group meetings.
15. Increased storage space and adequate staff work areas.

**c. Major Challenges**

1. Waterproofing the foundation of the leaking 1924 building, while possible, would be a costly challenge without removing the 1988 and 1977 additions.
2. The library is bounded on three sides by the town offices, Main Street, and the Marquis Cinema. Expanding into the parking lot created a concern among citizens about reduced parking.
3. The 1988 addition is inflexible because of large steel trusses that hold up the floors. The Library Building Committee determined that it was not possible to renovate the 1988 addition in such a way as to repurpose its space in a useful way.
4. Building onto or renovating a historic building always creates added complexity and cost.

**d. Ultimate Recommendation**

1. The Library Building Committee recommended a design that called for removing the 1977 and 1988 additions (totaling approximately 10,500SF); renovating the original 1924 structure (totaling approximately 8,400SF); and constructing a three story new addition (totaling approximately 19,700SF) in the space between the 1924 building and the Marquis Cinema. This design, estimated at 9.6 million dollars, demonstrated that all of the above design priorities could be accomplished on the library's current plot.
2. The Library Building Committee, the Library Trustees, and the Selectboard each endorsed this plan unanimously.

**B: Summary of changes since the previous design plan was developed. What was learned from the process of the previous Library Building Committee? What should be approached differently this time around?**

**1. Summary of Changes**

- a. The pandemic has brought home the importance of flexible spaces with good air circulation and multiple handicap accessible entrances. Libraries in Vermont that were able to quickly reconfigure their spaces, manage the flow of patrons, and keep down the viral load with a highly-functioning HVAC system were able to open to the public sooner than Ilsley.
- b. The pandemic pushed many library patrons who were previously uncomfortable with digital e-books and audiobooks to learn how to access these materials for the first time. As a result, the circulation of digital materials relative to physical materials increased. It is anticipated that many of these library patrons will continue using digital materials in the future. While physical materials are still, and will always be, the bedrock of the collection, the size of the physical circulating collection should be reassessed and the space devoted to collections reevaluated.
- c. The pandemic demonstrated that internet access is not a luxury but a necessity, and underscored the digital divide in Vermont. The role rural libraries play as a source of free, reliable internet 24 hours a day is critical to the state's infrastructure. Accessing the library's wifi 24/7 can be difficult when the building is closed, especially during cold winter months.
- d. The Downtown Master Plan process was completed. There is now a document that outlines guiding principles for developing the downtown area. Any renovation/expansion project should be considered in the context of the downtown master plan. There may be creative ways the library can accomplish, or partner with other institutions to accomplish, several of the goals and recommendations outlined in the plan.
- e. The federal House and Senate Appropriations Committees brought back earmarks after a 10-year moratorium. The Jeudevine Memorial Library in Hardwick, Vermont has already benefited with an appropriation of \$600,000 to build a teen and children's room and make the library more accessible. This is a possible funding stream that did not exist before. Other grant and funding possibilities could be explored.
- f. The library heating system is end of life, and adds urgency to the project timeline, as does the total lack of ventilation.
- g. Since 2017, construction costs have risen along with inflation in the rest of our economy. Using 2017 as a benchmark of 100, December 2021 cost indices stand at 119.6, and are projected to reach 128.8 by 2023 (Source: Construction Analytics, E. Zarenski.) Costs simply go up over time. If the \$9.6 million plan proposed by the Building Committee in 2017 were built today it would cost \$11.5 million. In addition, the cost of building materials has been subject to significant increases during the pandemic. Without knowing when supply chain issues and other pandemic related demand issues will resolve, it will be essential to pay close attention to cost estimates. The Ilsley 100 Project Team should seek out competent, informed cost-estimating resources who will establish contingencies for cost estimates in sync with current data and forecasts.

- h. The behavioral changes of the pandemic may be long-lasting, and some patrons may be wary of spending time in confined spaces with other people in the future. This could have design implications (outdoor spaces, open indoor spaces.)
- i. In order to cover increasing demand for library services and programs, the library has added 1.5 FTE staff positions since 2017, with no additional workspace.

**2. What was learned/should be done differently?**

- a. The Library Building Committee made extensive efforts to engage with the community and received lots of feedback, but many community members still felt that they hadn't been a part of the process. While there will always be those who feel their opinions were not adequately considered, future efforts should continue to solicit input from the community on the design process, engage and educate the community on the challenges involved in the process, invite ongoing comment, and make a persuasive case for the direction that is eventually chosen.

Recommendations:

1. Retain someone whose specific job is to communicate the work of the committee to the public throughout the entire project (similar to the way Jim Gish communicated the downtown bridge project).
  2. Present multiple conceptual designs early in the process and solicit input from the community.
  3. Go out into the community and meet people where they are, as opposed to asking people to come to the library or municipal building to give input.
- b. The estimated cost of the final design was a shock to many community members.

Recommendations:

1. Cost needs to be considered and communicated earlier in the process. Costs of renovation, expansion, or rebuilding need to be clearly justified to taxpayers.
- c. The charge to the Building Committee and its ultimate recommendation was very clear, but when their work was done the project was not greeted with enthusiasm. Exploring sources of funding and raising public support need to happen alongside the design work, to ensure the project is seen through to its completion. Recommendations:
  1. Convene two additional groups, one devoted to funding strategies and one devoted to community engagement, which will report to the Ilsley 100 Project Team.
  2. Ensure clear charges and lines of reporting for each of these groups. Ensure consistent communication between these groups, perhaps through overlapping membership.

**C: Recommended changes or refinements to the draft charge to the Ilsley 100 Project Team.**

See Appendix A, Draft Charge to Ilsley 100 Project Team.

**D. Recommended questions and considerations that the Ilsley 100 Project Team should explore as part of its process.**

1. The Ilsley Public Library building is presently in use and requires maintenance and improvements to meet building codes and the safety and comfort of its occupants. These needs must be met in

the interim, until a path forward for the Ilsley of the future is determined. Any near-term improvements should, as much as possible, benefit the potential library facility of the future, with minimal wasted expense and disruption.

2. The Ilsley 100 Project Team should develop a plan to accommodate library operations during any required maintenance, improvement, or renovation/expansion projects in the future. These may range from off-site accommodations for portions of the program to wholesale relocation of the library, depending upon the duration and degree of the projected disruptions. Costs for such accommodations need to be factored in to the overall project cost.
3. The Ilsley 100 Project Team and the proposed Funding Strategies Team should work with the town administration to strategize the most opportune time for any bond vote requests well in advance. The team should be aware of and consider other projects on the bond vote horizon, the tolerance of additional tax burden for citizens, the pay-down of existing bonds, and the benefits of partnerships and grants.

### **Controlled Vocabulary**

- The library's floors are referred to (in order from lowest to highest) as *ground floor*; *first floor*; *second floor*; and *third floor*.
- The *Library Building Committee* existed from 2014 to 2017, did extensive work on assessing building and community needs, and proposed a design plan in 2017.
- The *Working Group* was formed in August 2021, and charged with providing a summary of the work done by the 2014–2017 Library Building Committee and recommending a charge for its successor.

## **Appendix A**

### **Draft Charge to Ilsley 100 Project Team**

As revised by the Library Renovation/Expansion Working Group – January 6, 2022

#### **1. Charge**

Guide development of design options with a team of professionals that fulfill the vision statement provided below, accomplishing the goals of as many of the building pillars as possible. Coordinate funding strategies and community engagement efforts to bring the project to fruition.

#### **VISION STATEMENT**

The new Ilsley Public Library will be a welcoming, accessible, and safe community hub with the flexibility and sustainability to enrich community members' lives now and into the future.

#### **PILLARS**

- **WELCOMING:** Design, entrances, and light, open spaces invite everyone in and create a welcoming atmosphere with opportunities to be greeted directly.
- **ACCESSIBLE:** All spaces, interior and exterior, allow for and support inclusive participation for all community members.
- **SAFE:** All spaces prioritize the physical safety and health of staff and community members.
- **COMMUNITY HUB:** The building provides comfortable places for community members to gather, connect, collaborate, and learn together.
- **FLEXIBLE:** Spaces are able to accommodate shifting programmatic, technological, workflow, and collections needs into the future.
- **SUSTAINABLE:** The new building makes efficient use of limited resources such as energy and water, through excellence in design, construction, and maintenance.

#### **2. Key action items**

- a. Review the report prepared by the Library Renovation/Expansion Working Group.
- b. Re-assess current project needs and develop a square footage program to meet the library's operational needs in context with:
  - alignment with the 2020 Middlebury Downtown Master Plan and possible EDI project
  - highest and best use for current site and facility in light of above
  - potential partnerships (public or private) to enhance programs or share costs
  - current and anticipated community service program needs
  - ongoing maintenance, building code, environmental, and structural challenges
- c. Explore alternate development strategies such as master planning, phasing, and adaptive re-use as means of cost containment or strategic funding pathways. See Footnote <sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Guidance on overall project budget and costs. The Ilsley 100 Project Team, the Funding Strategies Team and selected professionals should present multiple project approaches at different cost points, with explanations of the benefits and drawbacks of each. Strategies for funding from different sources

- d. Consider a variety of professional services delivery modes including traditional DBB (Design-Bid-Build), DB (Design/Build), and CM (Construction Management) approaches.
- e. With Selectboard approval, engage an appropriate professional design team to meet challenges most effectively: consider engineers, architects, estimators, construction managers, design/builders, developers, fundraising and communications professionals. See Footnote <sup>2</sup>.
- f. Solicit public feedback and involvement on design and costs at every step of the way.
- g. Make recommendation to Library Trustees/Selectboard

Note, two separate subcommittees are envisioned as part of the Ilsley 100 Project Team:

- 1. A Community Engagement Team to solicit community feedback and involvement
- 2. A Funding Strategies Team to explore a variety of funding options

These teams would be formed and convened after the Ilsley 100 Project Team is up and running. It is anticipated that these teams will be chaired by members of the Ilsley 100 Project Team to provide clear communication. However, to avoid volunteer burnout the membership of these teams would not overlap.

### **3. Proposed timeline**

12–18 months.

### **4. Reporting**

The Ilsley 100 Project Team reports to the Selectboard, and should provide brief written reports to the Ilsley Public Library Board of Trustees on a regular basis, and more detailed reports as warranted or when reaching key decision points.

### **5. Meeting frequency**

The Ilsley 100 Project Team will meet at least semi-monthly (every two weeks).

### **6. Proposed Ilsley 100 Project Team composition and size**

The Ilsley 100 Project Team will be composed of seven voting members and two non-voting members. Voting members: two members of the Selectboard; two members of the library Trustees; one member of the public with funding expertise; one member of the public with community engagement and communications expertise; and one member of the public with

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should also be examined: bond vote, grants, public-private partnerships, developer investment, use of capital budgets for maintenance.

<sup>2</sup> In 2017 the Selectboard set aside \$25,000 for a fundraising feasibility study. The Ilsley Library Trustees propose putting these funds at the disposal of the Ilsley 100 Project Team for FY 2022 and budgeting additional capital funds for planning/design purposes for FY 2023. As a great deal of groundwork was completed by the previous building committee and architect (site analysis, engineering reports) these fees will enable the new project to be moved forward with a fresh professional design team and renewed confidence.

library administration and/or library design expertise. Non-voting members: library director and town administration liaison.

## **7. Resources**

The Ilsley 100 Project Team should draw on the following resources:

- a. 2017 feasibility report including engineering reports, site analysis, program analysis, and proposed design direction
- b. records, plans, and experience of 2014-2017 Library Building Committee
- c. 2020 building needs as prioritized by the Ilsley Trustees
- d. 2020 Downtown Master Plan
- e. expertise of town staff including library, planning, and public works
- f. expertise from members of the community including Development Review Board, Planning Commission, Energy Committee, and Infrastructure Committee
- g. expertise of a team of design professionals
- h. the Library Funding Strategy Team and Community Engagement Team

## **8. Next steps following recommended design**

Once a proposed design with projected costs is recommended, the Trustees and Selectboard will approve or disapprove of the proposed project. Projected costs will be analyzed for the most appropriate combination of funding sources to bring the project to fruition, including:

- a bond vote
- a fundraising campaign
- Grants (federal, state, private)
- potential partnerships

An implementation strategy will be discussed and approved by the Trustees and Selectboard.

## **9. Site and location**

The Ilsley 100 Project Team should not limit its efforts solely to renovating and possibly expanding the existing library building. The comparative costs, advantages, and disadvantages of alternative locations should be considered.