



[ilsleypubliclibrary.org](http://ilsleypubliclibrary.org)

**Ilsley Public Library**

Main Street, Middlebury VT | 802-388-4095

**Sarah Partridge Community Library**

East Main Street, East Middlebury VT | 802-388-7588

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To the participants of the Ilsley 100 Design Competition:

I am thrilled that after years of examining the current library building's deficiencies, exploring community needs, and evaluating varying scopes of work, we have finally arrived at the stage of this project that allows us to start visualizing solutions. As a librarian, major facilities projects fall outside of my field, and I have been learning about this process as I move through it with the Project Team. An explanation of design that has resonated with me is that "the conceptual design is a solution to the problem posed by the program."

Our aspirations for our program, coupled with the realities of space, budget, and an existing structure, certainly make for some interesting challenges. I will be on maternity leave from roughly mid-April to mid-June, and will likely not be available for consultation during the design competition. Instead, I am sharing a list of what I see as the top ten design challenges of this project (enclosed). If you have questions about the library program during my absence, Judith Harris, the competition's Technical Advisor and the Town Staff Project Team Liaison, will be your contact. Librarians Chris Kirby, Hayley Coble, Royce McGrath, and Tricia Allen have also been deeply involved in the development of the library program.

My hope is that this design competition stimulates new and exciting solutions, and generates an abundance of fresh thinking and original answers to the questions posed by our program. It is exhilarating to know that we have such creative, professional, and dynamic teams bringing their expertise to this process, and I am grateful for your participation. Your success in this endeavor will fuel the library project's ultimate success, as we build momentum and generate excitement in the community. I wish you the best of luck as you begin your work, and look forward to seeing your designs for our future library!

Sincerely,

Dana Hart  
Director

## Top Ten Design Challenges

1. **Sightlines and Safety.** Safety is, of course, our number one priority. One of the best ways to deliver safety in a public library is to ensure adequate sightlines throughout the building, so that librarians can visually monitor the public spaces. Unfortunately, the sightlines at Ilsley have gotten worse with each subsequent addition, and we do not have the personnel to staff more than two service desks throughout the building. *How can the renovation/expansion maximize sightlines given the spatial and staffing limits we're working within?*
2. **Accessibility.** For us, accessibility is more than a technical problem to solve: it prompts us to think about all of our library users, the breadth and depth of disabilities present in our community, and how we can create spaces that truly make everyone feel welcome. The challenge will be to apply this mindset to every aspect of design, not simply the inches and grades required for ADA compliance. *In what ways can thoughtful design support not just patrons with mobility issues, but patrons living with vision, hearing, speech, sensory, or cognitive and neurological disabilities?*
3. **Storage.** The necessity for storage space cannot be overstated. Libraries need more storage than almost everyone anticipates; if adequate storage is not provided, then other programmed spaces become crowded with furniture stacked in corners, boxes of books piled on the floor, and extra shelving weighted down with supplies. It limits the useable space, is unsightly, and can even be unsafe. Storage should include safe but readily accessible space for accumulation of trash and recycling between pick-ups. *In addition to the programmed storage closets, are there creative opportunities to maximize storage?*
4. **Maintenance.** The building's spaces, systems, and materials should all be designed with ease of maintenance in mind. Little things—like the number of different light bulbs we need to stock, surfaces that cannot be easily cleaned, regular replacement of wooden windowsills—really adds up, requiring time, money, and taxing staff morale. *Can the building's design limit the resources currently spent on maintenance, freeing us up to redirect those resources to collections, programs, and other services for the community?*
5. **Flexibility.** What will the library of the future look like? We don't know! The only certainty is that our programming needs will change over the coming decades and the building will need to adapt. It is also likely that, in addition to needing different spaces in the future, our overall need for space might increase. *Can this renovation/expansion be designed to allow for easy reconfiguration of interior spaces in the mid-term, and for potential additional expansions in the long-term?*
6. **Comfortable for Patrons.** Oftentimes, what makes for a comfortable patron experience is contradictory. Library users want to feel safe and secure (requires sightlines) but they also want to “curl up with a book in a nook” (requires at least the feeling of privacy). They want natural light, but we also need to mitigate against glare, which prohibits reading and computer work. They want large, open spaces that blend together so that different generations can interact, but they also need quiet, acoustically treated spaces that allow for focused work. *How can we balance all of these competing needs in one building?*

7. **Functional for Staff.** Library work is complex and extremely varied. In the course of a single day, one librarian might check-in and shelve books (utilizing book drop space, computer, rolling book truck); run a program (utilizing storage space/supplies, program space, custodial clean-up supplies); process incoming books (utilizing processing equipment, supplies, generating cardboard/packaging waste); help patrons (circulation desk); and place book orders or plan programs (personal workspace/computer). Of course, librarians are people, too (utilizing breakroom and restroom). Ensuring that there is enough space for all library staff to do their jobs is the bare minimum we want to achieve with this renovation/expansion, but we hope to do even more: *can good design help our librarians move through their varied tasks with greater ease and efficiency?*
8. **Tech Support.** Ten or twenty years ago, it might have been reasonable to ask “Where are the computers going to go?” and designate one or two rooms for that purpose. Today, the only answer to this question is “Anywhere we want, at any given time.” *With the exception of overhead spaces, how can we ensure that every room in the library is prepared to accommodate both current and emerging library and patron technology?*
9. **MCTV.** Ilsley is the only public library in Vermont that hosts a community television space in our building. Middlebury Community Television not only occupies the third floor of the current building; they are also a valued partner to the library. Right now, our spaces are very remote. While we are separate organizations and do need separate spaces, library and MCTV staff work closely together, and from a public user perspective, having our spaces be more seamless makes sense. *How can MCTV spaces be integrated into the library design so that staff and patrons can benefit from the synergy of two organizations with similar missions of public access?*
10. **Outdoor Programming Spaces.** The library’s current garden is beloved by the community, and we know patrons cherish being outdoors during summer months. We also learned the value of outdoor programming space during the pandemic. On the other hand, our footprint is tight, and to get the square footage our program requires will likely take us to the limits of our property line. *How can we design a building that maximizes our property footprint but still allows for some outdoor programming space for the community to enjoy?*

### Bonus Challenge

**“Surprise and delight.”** During a series of focus groups a few years ago, the community made it clear that they want the library to take risks and evolve, and they expect to be surprised and delighted by library offerings. Many communities only want “more space for books,” but Middlebury is an extremely forward thinking and open minded community when it comes to their library—we are so lucky! As such, we want a library building that honors this spirit and is a source of inspiration to the community. At the same time, the addition will necessarily be in dialogue with our 100-year-old original building. *How can the renovation/expansion’s design “surprise and delight” our community while still honoring the historic architecture of our 1924 Carnegie style library?*