

Questions posed in Ames Public Library Expansion Public Meetings (By Category)
February 16 & 17, 2009

Branches

Q: Is a branch library under consideration?

Scherer: Under this study, a branch is not under consideration. It could be an issue in the future, but the priority now is to get the central library in good shape.

Dalhgren: Ames is really on the border line. As a rule of thumb, a community might start to consider a branch when it reaches a population of 50,000. That is partly because it becomes more inconvenient to get to a central location as a town enlarges. We did look at this question in 2007 while working on the needs assessment study. At present, there is concern about the necessary duplication of staff, operating cost, and collection resources. In the end, we decided on strengthening the “trunk.” Sustaining the health of downtown is also a consideration in Ames.

Q: We are from a town where the branch library was part of our local neighborhood community. Could that be something in the future for Ames?

Consultants: There are options that might be considered. In Fargo, for example, there is what we call a “pop-up library” located in a strip mall. It is not a full-service branch, but a person can reserve a book and arrange to pick it up there.

Q: One gentleman was concerned that you only showed new buildings and I think that often the City has a biased presentation. I wonder about what you consider “ideal” in terms of a parking lot. I wish you would consider a different “ideal” that didn’t include so many people coming in their own cars. Also, west Ames is always underserved. Have you considered any different locations?

Scherer: One of the three options we have to work with in Phase I of our contract is to consider other sites. We are not doing a branch study, however.

Q: Has anyone thought about moving part of the collection to a different site?

Dalhgren: I would advise against that. The various aspects of the collections are inseparably linked. A couple years ago, we looked at multiple facilities in Ames. The concerns raised then still exist, including the staffing costs and the duplication of hours. We decided that the resource and service issues in the central library needed to be resolved first.

Furthermore, the capital costs of building the structure only amount to 6-12% of the money that will be spent on the library over 20 years. The rest is for maintenance, collection development, staffing.

Q: What about expanding the bookmobile? Could we have 2 buses?

Staff: We are in the process of planning a new bookmobile stop at Green Hills. Overall, the bookmobile is very expensive on a per item or per user basis.

Community Meetings

Q: What chances will there be going forward for input into the library planning process?

Scherer: Over the next few months we will be holding meetings to hear points of view and ideas that will help us make design decisions. We want you to think about what could be done in Ames that is clever and creative, and we urge you to offer your ideas at upcoming meetings and on the cards you have tonight.

Q: As a person who was involved in the 1983 library addition project, I want to say that it was done without anything close to the community input this project has already had. I want people to realize that this process is far more open and public than that one was.

Scherer: It is important to take a long time to think about what you are doing, and to determine what your library will look like 20 years from now. The outcome is so much better when people own their decisions. People respect the outcome when they know their concerns have been grappled with.

Q: How many future public meetings are included in your contract?

Scherer: I would be surprised if we could get through the basics in less than four or five more meetings; we will take as much time as needed to get it right.

Q: What is the process?

Scherer: We will ask for your ideas and we will let you discuss the pros and cons. A couple ground rules work well: 1) come to all the meetings; 2) don't go over things in one meeting that were covered in the last one.

Q: Will there be any meetings that are smaller than this?

Scherer: We will be happy to set up the meetings any way you want. You may want to indicate your preference on the card when you hand it in. There are some other meetings tomorrow that we expect may be smaller.

Q: At what point will the site be determined?

Scherer: First we'll have to present several options and bring them back to the groups. We can offer professional guidance, but you will need to make decisions. The group will determine whether we go with an addition on top, take down the whole structure and rebuild it, or start fresh on another site.

Q: How will the public make a decision?

Scherer: The group will come to a consensus.

Q: Will that be the group present at the last meeting?

Scherer: Once it seems that the group has reached a consensus, the Library Board will weigh in. Ultimately, the City Council would initiate a bond referendum.

Q: When are the next meetings?

Staff: A City Council workshop has been scheduled on the evening of March 10 at 7 p.m. There will also be public meetings coming up in the next several months. These are anticipated to take place on March 17 and 18, May 19 and 20, June 16 and 17, July 21 and 22. The sixth set of public meetings will probably be held on September 15 and 16.

Demographics

Q: What information does the library have on utilization by different age groups?

Scherer: Staff will look in to that. The consultants do know that half the books being checked out are children's; half is adult subject matter.

Note: A preliminary study by staff reveals a relatively even distribution of library use by age. Watch for information on the library's blog spot for the results of the study.

Q: There are about 22,000 college students in Ames. Do they use the APL?

Staff: We find that students who live off-campus and in this vicinity use it; especially those who are looking for young adult and children's materials, since ISU has a school of education. We are able to look at the number of people who come through the doors, and we can track the types of materials that are checked out, but we don't have a way to classify the users.

Q: Does the ISU student population skew the usage figures?

Scherer: Interestingly, the APL circulation figures are closer to those we typically see for a city of 150,000. Among libraries across the nation serving populations of 55,000 or less, APL ranks within the top ten. The average U.S. library circulates six items per capita; Ames circulates 30.

Q: How many materials are checked out for children as compared to adults?

Staff: There is about a 50/50 split between adult and youth materials being checked out.

Q: Demographically, who is using the library? As a teacher, I see a lot of on-line learning and fewer text books.

Scherer: We know that the print collections for children and adults are being used equally, but it's not known what age group is actually checking out which type of material. Parents are likely to be checking out books for their children.

Q: Are teens really an important demographic?

Scherer: Libraries are spaces for community. People will hang out in places where they feel welcome. If teens, even gang members in towns such as Salina, California, go to the library for homework help, they develop a new outlook and their social life changes. So there can be a social justice aspect to the mission of a library.

The Economy

Q: In the past six to twelve months we have seen (an economic) contraction and you are proposing doubling the space. Will there be different options?

Scherer: Certainly. You do have to reconcile the economics to the use and you even have the option of doing nothing. One trend we've seen is that when economic times are tight, library usage goes up.

Q: Should we be doing this in such a tough economic time?

Scherer: It may be a good time for planning. People tend to ask tough questions during times of stress, and perhaps it will be favorable time to hire construction firms when we have completed the design phase.

General

Q: What do you mean by "circulation?"

A. Circulation refers to a lending transaction – whether it's a book, DVD, or other item.

Q: Will minutes of this meeting be available?

Information will be on-line and there are two blogs operating: msrlibraryworld.wordpress.com and amespubliclibrary.blogspot.com

Green building

Q: Whatever you do, it will be LEED-certified, right?

Scherer: That depends on what the community wants and is willing to invest. MS&R is very interested in carbon footprint. We just completed a building that is energy neutral, but decided not to apply for LEED certification. Our company has, however, signed a 2030 challenge agreeing not to take on a client that isn't net zero.

Q: How far can you go with a green building?

Scherer: That will be determined by the community. There are all sorts of new options and we could easily go to the highest standard. It might add six to eight percent to the cost of the building, but that amount of savings would be captured within a decade.

Location

Q: Have you considered how much the library would lose by not being in the “hottest spot” it could be?

Scherer: It’s likely that Ames has as high a circulation rate as it does because it is in a location people find convenient. Statistics point to the fact that you should locate in the “hottest” spot.

Money-related

Q: How much has the City been budgeting for the library?

Scherer: The library has about a \$3,000,000 annual operating budget.

Q: Are we assuming the cost of the expansion being borne by gifts and grants?

Scherer: There will probably be a plan for a referendum in Ames. Library construction is usually a combination of private and public money.

Q: What was the cost of the St. Cloud Public Library project?

Staff: According to the *St. Cloud Times*, the project cost was \$32 million.

Q: When the square footage doubles, what happens to the operating cost?

Scherer: There have been two big changes in the way that libraries operate now as opposed to the past. Self-check machines and a “concierge” desk allow staff to act as roaming service persons, rather than retrieving and checking out books. Nowadays the staff here does twice as much work per person as they did 20 years ago. The number of FTE (full time employees) does not grow exponentially with the size of the facility.

Q: Do we know if we’ll have a tax base to support paying for a new library?

Dahlgren: Our population estimates were made with assistance from the Iowa Data Center. Ames has basically been at the high end of the scale in support and usage of the library. If it had been squeezed on the financial end, you wouldn’t see the results in terms of use.

MS&R Contract

Q: Under the terms of the proposal, what were you asked to do and how much will it cost?

Scherer: There will be Phase I and Phase II of this project, and we are now just starting Phase I. It involves public meetings, such as this one, so that we can develop concept design and determine what might go in each room, site selection, and artist's renderings and cost estimates for up to three alternatives. The work itself could cost as much as \$282,000 and up to \$24,000 has been allowed for reimbursement of expenses and travel, so the total contract is not to exceed \$306,000.

Q: Where is the funding coming from?

Weeks: Some money will be used from bequests to the library, along with some funds from the library's capital improvement program.

Q: What does Phase II involve?

Scherer: Phase II includes the detailed design and architectural plans, bid letting and supervision of construction.

Q: What will the fee for Phase II be? Is it a percentage?

Scherer: I couldn't say; we don't yet know what we will be building.

Needs and Wants

Q: What types of requests is the library getting that it unable to fulfill?

Weeks/Carey: We can usually satisfy needs for books, but we frequently turn down requests for meetings rooms. There is also a general lack of "gathering space" where people can connect. We find that people with children often use the library as a place where they feel part of a community. Presently, the library does not encourage people to hang around or browse. We are using all our shelves and have reached the point where we have to remove an old book whenever we buy a new one. In addition, we have 36-inch-wide-aisles. When the day comes that revised ADA standards are enforced, we will have to reduce the collection considerably.

New libraries usually have 66-inch-high shelves and nothing on the bottom level. The ambiance of the space makes for a pleasant browsing experience, which has several results: circulation goes higher, people stay longer, and they make different connections with their neighbors.

Q: Some of the photos that showed vast, soaring ceilings made the bookshelves look inefficient. Why should we spend money for a 40-foot ceiling, when all you want to do is look for a book and check it out or sit and read?

Consultants: There has been a change over the years in the way libraries are used. From the 1890s through the 1980s, libraries were planned with close stacks and narrow aisles. Often librarians retrieved the book and the customer took it and sat in a grand space to read it. Libraries are no longer seen simply as warehouses for books. By integrating seating into the stacks, people browse, find related materials, and use the building productively.

One of the reasons high ceilings were incorporated into the Fayetteville library was to harvest daylight. That allowed the space to be used without any electrical lighting.

It is possible to conserve space with compact shelving. Materials are not open to an aisle, but a customer can press a button to open the cabinet. This is a way to store older magazines, for example. Segregating the stacks into one efficient area will cut costs, but most people coming to public library are often coming just to “be there” or browse.

Weeks: The APL has found that low ceilings and high stacks contribute to security problems because staff can't observe the activities going on in the aisles.

Q: Does the term “utilitarian” enter into your idea of design? Could this building accommodate three stories?

Scherer: There really are three inter-related circles when it comes to design: the quality of the space, the size of the space, and how much money can be spent. These elements are what the community needs to grapple with as we move on in determining the balance between the iconographic, emblematic aspect and pure literacy.

Q: Is there any evidence that people are being injured by not having adequate reading material?

Scherer: I would say that it's better to look at that question in light of what benefits could be fully realized by having a fully-functioning facility. There are some limitations here for those who are unable to get through the narrow aisles in a wheelchair.

Q: My wife mentioned that her small town library used to check out specialty cake pans and she wondered if we could do something like that.

Scherer: Some libraries offer alternative materials such as those. Oakland has a tool library. In some places there are garden libraries. Johnston County, KS, has a small branch near a lake where they lend fishing poles. I have seen a library with a cookie bowl in youth area. They have play cookies and other learning toys in pans and muffin tins to help them learn counting. It is great to pair motor skills with the associated reading and to have a place that is cognitively different for kids. They respond well to color, themes, low shelving and shorter service desks.

Parking

Q: How many parking spaces will be required?

Scherer: The Ames zoning code actually requires five (5) parking spaces/1000 sq. ft. of area, but we believe this is high. Based on a 94,000 square foot building, and if we base a calculation on four (4) spaces per 1000 square feet, about 365 spaces would be needed. The reality is that if people are simply using the library to drop in, browse for a magazine or get a book, fewer parking spaces are needed, but in order to accommodate a big public meeting, you need more. I don't recommend you build for the maximum use. Society is likely to change its thinking about downtown parking in the next 20 years.

Q: Aren't parking spaces already available at the library?

Scherer: There are 84 stalls in the lot across the street to the north and about 65 are available. (Four of the 84 stalls are handicap spaces and 15 are currently under rental contract.) We will have to look at the surrounding area to address the parking situation. The Library Board of Trustees may decide not to do anything about it, but we'll have to see.

Q: How will you handle the deficiency of parking?

Consultants: Ames is in between wanting to be a big city and still functioning as a little city. It is time to have a discussion about structured parking if the library stays downtown. There's room for about 120 cars per acre on asphalt. We'll talk about the economics and benefit of a parking structure. The reality is that one cannot expect the conveniences of being at the edge of town when one is downtown. We are hoping to see a societal change in terms of transportation. One would never size a church parking lot just to accommodate Easter Sunday.

Q: Can you give us an example of a parking lot in town that would have 356 stalls?

Consultants did not have the answer to this question at the meeting, but City Planners have indicated that there are approximately 350 spaces in the public parking lots south of Main Street (between Clark Avenue and Duff Avenue). The two lots west of City Hall (Lots M and MM) together contain approximately 300 stalls. There are 550 stalls in the parking lot at the Target store on South Duff. The ramp at Mary Greeley Medical Center has about 140 stalls on each of three levels, for a total of 400-420.

Q: Is that big a parking lot realistic?

Consultants: The numbers we are using tonight are ideal benchmarks. The community process we are just now starting will help us make choices about what we can/can't or want/don't want to do. The size of the building itself, for example, is dependent on the style of shelving you choose, how high it is and how wide the aisles are, for example.

Population

Q: Was your future population estimate census-based?

Dalhgren: The 66,689 number is a projection made by a demographer from the State of Iowa and is based on a three percent (3%) growth rate. The number is intended to include the City of Ames and the surrounding service area.

Prestige

Q: If we were to go to a very large expansion by taking up three-quarters of the block the library sits on now, for example, what impact would that have on the city's growth and prestige?

Scherer: There are multiple bloom effects for a library that is built smartly, beyond just meeting the research and entertainment needs of the community. We have been working in some very distressed places in the U. S. and looking at the role the library plays in the economic future of the city. I believe public library service is part of our social contract. If you are too conservative, you run the risk of short-changing the future.

Today's libraries should create space where people can get together, study, learn and relate to each other. Innovation and intellect are the best resources we have left in this country. We stay a step ahead of everyone, and that is where prestige comes from. When people look at statistics, who do they want to aspire to be? I can tell you that libraries want to be like Ames. The long-term impact is a serious, important question.

I worked on a library in California that was really "stretched." They needed 30,000 feet and built 45,000; they included a 350-seat auditorium and all kinds of space for programming. The library is heavily used; in fact, a person has to stand in line to get tickets to their programs. Keep in mind that this is a group of people that have plenty of money to buy books, they have their own computers, and they don't need free services. The fact is that they want to be around people. That is an intangible that it can be difficult to ask people to pay for – but it is related to the prestige question.

In towns similar to Ames around the nation, (Lawrence, Fayetteville, Norman, for example) where a lot of retirees may be attracted because of their affiliation with a university, we find there is a great interest in libraries and cultural activities. The University of North Carolina's Lifelong Learning Institute has found that daily exercise – both physical and mental – has a correlation with health and longevity.

Space needs

Q: Why do we need to add seating? I never see a lack of chairs.

Consultants: Seating space has been reduced over the years to make room for computers and the collection. We have also noticed a slight decline or plateau in the number of visitors since 2005 – something that often happens when a building is overcrowded or there is a lack of parking. We find that people come in and make more use of the library when the atmosphere is inviting and comfortable.

Q: Why are you recommending doubling the amount of space in the library and how would it be used?

Scherer: We have not determined exactly how the space will be apportioned. At the next meeting we expect to include a comparison of what we have now and what we might propose. From a library planning perspective, based on the through-put at this facility, approximately 68,000 square feet is really needed today. A building of 94,000 square feet would be designed to accommodate future needs.

Q: How does the square foot per capita figure you're using compare nationally?

Dahlgren: 1.5 square feet per capita is within a conventional range.

Scherer: 1.5 is the ideal minimum, but it depends on how the library is going to be used, and I don't consider the minimum to be "ideal."

Q: Have there been times that the size of meetings has exceeded the capacity of the rooms?

Staff: Yes.

Q: What percentage of the times the library is open are the rooms in use?

Note: Staff is working on this question. The answer will be forthcoming.

Q: How large will the children's area be?

Scherer: We are thinking that it will be in the range of 16,000 to 24,000 square feet, maybe 25 percent of the total. At the next meetings we will be prepared to show you a comparison of the present configuration to what we might propose.

Q: Have you contemplated offering computer classes for older adults?

Carey: We offered those classes up until we had no enrollment. We could try that again.

Dahlgren: Some communities with high numbers of retirees have put PCs in the lobby so that customers can work on e-mail with their grandchildren. It helps take that type of user out of spaces designed for people doing long-term computer work.

Space at the 515 Douglas location

Q: What would you add to the library in the empty adjacent area, formerly occupied by Strand Paint?

Scherer: The property is about 7000 square feet in area, and more than one floor could be built. There is also about a 7000-square-foot section of the 1985 addition that was designed to have another floor built above it.

Q: Can expansion to 94,000 square feet be done on the existing site?

Scherer: Mathematically, a building of that size can be built on that site. We do want to make sure to offer a structure that “works.”

Q: Does the APL own additional land than this building is on, and will it meet the space requirements?

Scherer: The adjacent empty lot that is owned by the library is about 7000 square feet, and two or three levels could be built, so up to about 21,000 square feet can be added there.

Q: Can you build on top of this (existing) building?

Scherer: A small section of the south end could support another story.

Q: Has the Library Director or the Board of Trustees made any effort to seek other land, as in a donation?

Weeks: No, and we wouldn't want to purchase land until we know what the citizens want.

Q: It seems to me that unless we tear this place down and build a new high rise, we will never reach the space requirements.

Scherer: It will be up to the community to decide on that. You may decide you'd prefer to stay here and go with a smaller amount of square footage.

Q: How can you get enough area here unless you build a five-story building? Is there a formula for the size of each floor?

Scherer: I wouldn't recommend a footprint of 20,000 sq. ft with five stories. For one thing, it's more expensive, but it's also not very navigable and it's hard to allow for flexibility or expansion of collections. I would also not recommend having more than 40,000 square feet on any one level – it gets too spread out. It's optimal to have 25,000 to 30,000 square feet per floor.

Q: Could the property across the street from the library be available?

Staff: The Elks Club might be available and the adjacent house is; we're not sure if Adams Funeral Home could be converted for library use.

Q: Is there enough space to get all we need at the current site?

Scherer: That is the point of doing the feasibility study. There are many options, but we have to take into account social and economic factors along with the physical. At this point, we have been charged with looking only at options downtown.

Technology

Q: We are all aware that there are significant technological changes going on; in 1984, for example, we didn't plan for computer stations. What other trends are there that we may not be thinking about planning for? On a related note, aren't libraries dying now that people have access to the Internet?

Scherer: Actually, increasing use of the Internet has gone hand-in-hand with increased circulation nationally. Today's children are being taught in groups in school, in collaborative settings, and it has been shown that a key driver to student success is peer pressure for studying. Today's kids function best in a collegial, collaborative, teaming environment, so we believe the library needs to accommodate that style. We should think about offering a homework center where students can create a U-Tube presentation on Abraham Lincoln. They come to the library where there is access to print material, on-line information, equipment to create the project and space where they can collaborate and end up doing a good job.

In spite of what some may think, the percentage of books being checked out since introduction of the personal computer has not decreased. Kids are actually reading more. A recent Pugh Internet study of teens between the ages of 13 and 19 found that, of those who went into a library for the purpose of using a computer, more than half ended up staying to read. Until they got inside, many of them just didn't know what the library had to offer.

Dalhgren: The basic issue is that different formats are different. The advantages to certain resources in electronic form don't negate the importance of another form, and they don't replace one another. It's not hard to imagine that one person would prefer to read a book, another may need the audio version, and still another may need it in large type.

Scherer: Don't forget that gadgetry is driven by the capitalist profit motive, not by what is needed. Many of the latest devices have shelf-life of six months to a year. It is my belief that a library's role is to maintain a higher standard than "what will sell." A library should be device neutral and information rich because technology will always change.

Q: Do you have statistics on library use after the advent of the Internet? Don't statistics show that library usage is trending downward?

Scherer: That is a myth. Library usage has, in fact, gone up every decade and has risen 60% since the introduction of the Internet. Library usage has actually changed quite a bit, however. Many libraries have technology training rooms and areas for computer use. People search on line, but sometimes that takes longer. Even in communities where there are a lot of home computers, we have not seen a decrease in library usage.

Q: Isn't there more non-print material out now?

Dalhgren: That's true. Twenty years ago, we probably had 5 non-print items for every 100 print items in most collections and today we probably have 10 to 15 non-print items per hundred.

Q: How does the i-phone factor into readership?

Scherer: One format does not necessarily replace another. Remember that the Kindle® has a screen with about 90 dpi and a book is usually around 600. Batteries go out in electronic devices and they tend to be replaced by a newer version frequently. On the other hand, most books can be circulated at least 23 times, they are very portable, and don't work only in a specific environment. I think many people find that they use different media at different points of their day.

Beyond that, there is a continuum being created now. Materials without copyright are available everywhere through Project Gutenberg or Google. At the other end of the spectrum are the 240,000 titles now available for use on a \$359 Kindle®. It seems to me that a library's job is to parse out what is valuable and to make it available to everyone. We should not presume that people should pay a lot of money for something that has to be replaced in six months.

To answer the question, I think there is probably only about a 5% impact on readership. There is surely some percentage of people who can use technology to solve all their reading needs, but definitely not all can. Libraries, in my opinion, need to plan for bringing opportunity and literacy to everyone.

Q: What trends in library use are you seeing?

Scherer: I am currently studying the introduction of technology and its impact on libraries. Reference material is being replaced by computer stations, so we find libraries actually need more space. Circulation has not gone down at all; in fact, all measures point to the idea that technology is leading to higher library usage. There is also greater use of and need for community spaces and rooms for collaborative interaction.

The capitalist business model depends on throwing away the previous format, so they keep piling formats on. But I think there is voodoo in the capitalist model. We're in a shakedown period now and soon everything is going to have to sustain itself. (See related questions.)

Q: Do you think advances in technology will negate the validity of your projections?

Dalhgren: We have observed that the personal computer has had no effect on reducing circulation. New technology does not destroy the library; it compliments the library. New forms of media add to the available options, they do not replace those already being used.

People use libraries differently today than they did in the past, just as they work differently – more collaboratively, in work groups. Libraries have been very effective in offering homework help in the inner cities. There are instances of non-profits working in libraries with gangs who are getting off the streets, engaging in intellectual competitions, finding new means of gaining self-worth. Some of these libraries are helping transforming society.

Q: What effect does technology have on staff?

One of the biggest effects will be automation, especially in circulation, and that will allow staff to be redeployed to work with customers. I would say 95% of the materials could go out through self-check and books being returned can come in on a conveyor. New machines are able to check-in and place books on carts in the correct order so they are ready to be reshelved as soon as they are retrieved. There is an absolutely incredible amount of through-put in the Ames Public Library and the work areas are severely overcrowded. It's quite amazing what this staff is able to accomplish; it's evident when you compare circulation figures with other libraries around the nation.

Type of construction

Q: You showed two library projects earlier, but a few years ago the APL condemned an adjacent building. Were either of those projects renovations? Why are we looking at a brand new structure? Why aren't you looking at renovating?

Those examples were not renovations and we were not trying to pre-condition the outcome; we used them to give you an idea of what some other communities have come up with after moving through the decision-making process.

Q: Could we just renovate this building?

Scherer: It could be renovated – but it needs changes, some of which just have to do with air handling standards and building code issues. It would definitely not be just paint.

Timeline

Q: When will the new library be done?

Scherer: It probably couldn't be started until 2011 or 2012.

Q: What will happen to the library 30 years from now?

Scherer: We have just started these meetings to get feedback from the public, and have not started putting pen to paper to see how it will come out.