

Construction

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Board of Library Commissioners



Massachusetts Public Library Construction Program

Highlights of Public Library Design

The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioner's (MBLC) Public Library Construction program was first funded by a state bond authorization in 1987. The program provides funding and support for communities as they seek to improve access to library services through the construction or renovation of a public library. Since its inception, the program has awarded 290 grants totaling over \$304 million. During the more than 20 years of the construction program, MBLC building consultants have guided hundreds of communities through the process and have gained insight into the design elements that should be considered when building or renovating a public library. That information, along with suggestions from William Sannwald's *Checklist of Library Building Design Considerations*, has been included here to assist communities as they begin the public library construction process with the MBLC.

Exterior

What to consider

- Visible & recognizable from the road
- Vehicle & pedestrian traffic patterns that don't mix
- One story building for 15,000-18,000 sq ft or less
- One parking space per 400 gross sq ft of building in addition to handicapped spaces (a guideline)
- Covered entries to protect from weather
- Parking lot well oriented to entrance

What to avoid

- Multiple public entrances
- Steep roofs that dump snow on walkways & people
- Sites that are
 - Oddly shaped or cramped
 - In a park
 - On a high windswept hill out of town
- Extra-long handicapped ramps
- No place to pile snow
- No place to hide a dumpster
- Flat roofs
- Stucco exterior finishes

Main Entrances/Lobbies &

Circulation Areas

What to consider

- Vestibule with two sets of doors for an air lock
- Large bulletin board & generous room for pamphlets, tax forms, etc.
- The following should be visible from entry: main desk, main staircase, elevator, path to children's room, rest rooms, meeting room entrance
- Space and outlets for self-checkout units

What to avoid

- Columns that:
 - Obstruct view from public service desks
 - "Grow" in width for design reasons
- North facing main entrances that never thaw

Children & Teen Rooms

What to consider

- Children's rooms that:
 - Have well-defined and separate preschooler and older children's areas
 - Have computers located in areas where preschoolers don't have easy access
 - Have enough storage for an accumulation of craft supplies, etc.
 - Have good sight lines from service desks
 - Have room for self-check units
- Teen rooms that:
 - Are designed with teen input
 - Are easily and discretely monitored from service desks
 - Have teen friendly furnishings
- Both children & teen rooms should be conveniently located & out of traffic flow

What to avoid

- Story hour pits for adults to fall into or risers for children to play on
- Hideouts dubbed "reading nooks"
- Isolated or below grade basement locations
- No windows
- Use of solid doors with no glazing anywhere, except children's toilet
- Adjacent to quiet areas

Meeting & Quiet Study Rooms

What to consider

- Large meeting rooms that:
 - Are well-integrated into the floor plan
 - Have entrances visible from main desk
 - Are located adjacent to rest rooms
 - Have entrance & rest rooms adjacent for after hours access
 - Have convenient and adequate storage for tables, chairs & AV equipment
 - Can be darkened
 - Have a HVAC with separate controls and runs quietly
 - Have at least one set of double entry doors
- All interior doors with glazing
- Enough small quiet study rooms to meet demand
- Quiet study rooms that can be easily monitored by staff

What to avoid

- Large meeting rooms that:
 - Are isolated from the rest of the library
 - Have entrance and pantry located so that activity in/around them distracts audiences and speakers
 - Do not have appropriate security for art exhibits
 - Have poor lighting for speakers and art exhibits
- Columns that obstruct views
- Inadequate or inconvenient storage
- No soundproofing between rooms and adjacent spaces

Rest Rooms

What to consider

- Visible from main desk & entry
- Floor drains, even in single toilets
- Changing tables, even in men's room:
- Children's toilet or "family room"
 - Located in children's room
 - Visible to staff
 - Standard fixtures, not toddler-sized

What to avoid

- Staff rest rooms that open into staff lounge/kitchen
- Walls or ductwork that allow for sound transfer from a human voice, noisy hand dryers, or clanging toilet paper holders
- Urinals that are visible when door opens

Windows, Skylights & Doors

What to consider

- Windows that take advantage of solar gain in cold weather and control solar radiation in hot weather
- Windows that afford good views

What to avoid

- Too many oddly placed windows
- Glare from windows and skylights on computer screens
- Inoperable windows
- No glazing in doors into office spaces, meeting rooms, story hour rooms, etc.
- Leaky skylights
- Skylights placed over valuable equipment or furnishings
- Too many windows
- Windows requiring expensive window treatments

Lighting

What to consider

- Use of the same light bulbs throughout the building
- Lights on occupancy sensors where they make sense
- Use of energy efficient bulbs
- Stack lighting that runs perpendicular to stack aisles

What to avoid:

- A large variety of (exotic & expensive) fixtures that require expensive or overpriced bulbs
- Lights bulbs that require scaffolding to change
- Meeting room lights that do not illuminate instantly
- Stack lighting that casts shadows

Ramps and Elevators

What to consider

- Ramps & public entrances that meet ADA requirements
- Elevators, not lifts
- Elevators visible from main desk

What to avoid

- Inaccessible historic entrances that are used as the public entrance
- Ramps that slope down to an entrance that could flood

Other Considerations for a Well-designed Public Library

- Safe, secure, and accessible inside and out
- Show of respect for local history and culture
- Construction, furnishing, fixtures, and equipment that are durable, long lasting, and timeless
- Easy and cost-effective operations and management
- Proven, common sense, and cost-effective green features
- Fire rated book drops/book drop rooms
- Generous storage
- Flexibility to change with changing needs
- Book Sale sorting room adjacent to meeting room

Other Elements to Avoid

- Multi-story Atriums
- Hard (plaster) ceiling in the main lobby or children's room — this is an acoustic nightmare
- Complicated/noisy HVAC systems and lighting controls
- Dark shelving (black/brown/navy) and other dark surfaces that show dust
- "Reading gardens" that require weeding
- Gaps at corner of balcony railings large enough for children to fit through
- Spiral staircases
- Walls that don't meet the ceiling
- Roof access via ships' ladders—difficult to climb

Library Director's To-Do List

- Remember: no building is perfect and you will make mistakes
- Expect delays
- Involve staff often and early, including maintenance staff
- Start planning to move into the building well in advance
- Keep donors informed and the project in the public eye
- Attend every construction meeting
- Keep detailed, DATED notes
- Save all as-built drawings for future reference
- Organize and keep all warranties and instructions

The "People" Element in the Building Process

- Librarians should be involved in the process, have vision, and be willing to learn
- Library staff should feel comfortable talking with the Library Director about design concerns BEFORE completion. Waiting until after a library opens to express these concerns doesn't help anyone.

For more information on public library design visit the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners website, www.mass.gov/mblc, or contact:

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