

THE VISION OF THE COMMUNITY

Community input was gathered from a cross-section of the community via three different types of discussions.

One, we facilitated a General Community Meeting with 19 participants. Two, we held one-on-one interviews with 12 community leaders, including the Chairman of the Albany County Commission and the Mayor of the City of Laramie. Three, we facilitated five focus groups that attracted a total of 23 participants.

Focus group participants were also asked to complete a Library Services Response Ranking exercise. The results of the Services Response Rankings are found on page 8.9 of this chapter.

A summary of the each of the three discussions begins with the General Community Meeting.

GENERAL COMMUNITY MEETING

A General Community Meeting was held the evening of July 29, 2009, in the Meeting Room of the downtown Laramie Library. Nineteen persons attended plus the principal consultant and a note taker.

The meeting was conducted in a similar fashion to the Focus Groups. A summary of the expressions follows.

What Do You Like About This Library?

The Library is an inviting place for families and children and the staff is very accommodating. The location is very good. The Library's website is inclusive and current. The programming that the Library does, especially for young people, is outstanding.

What Are The Negatives Of This Library?

The hours of service are inadequate, especially being closed on Mondays. There is not enough parking, not enough computers, and not enough meeting space. The YA section collection should be expanded to include a broader interest. The carpet is worn and old, the lighting needs to be addressed, and the restrooms should be renovated.

The loss of the second meeting room is unfortunate.

The computers in the Children's area are not the best.

What Are The Needed Improvements?

Diverse and different types of meeting rooms (small, medium, large), including a computer lab that will allow for enhanced electronic capabilities.

There is a need for a larger space for both the Children's area and the Teens area.

If a new facility is to be considered look at one that could be expanded to a second floor.

The Wyoming Room could possibly be expanded, plus adding new equipment. Provide new carpet, furniture, paint, etc. to make the building more attractive.

Acquire the house on the corner for more parking.

Explore solar options using grant funds. If the Library is "more green," then less money will need to be expended for electricity. Thus more can be devoted to services.

Expand the collection rather than the facility.

There is a need for improved Internet connectivity as well as a need to have one staff position that can deal with computer issues.

Solutions If A New Facility Were Built

Use the parking area to build on and add parking after the original building is demolished. Consider moving the library into the civic center as a temporary solution if a new building is built (would be about two years).

Other Comments

The basement is not being utilized to optimum.

The Library must have a focus. It cannot be all things for all people.

Could the Friends books sale materials be re-located across the street?

What elements of the population are the Public Library serving that is not being addressed by the university?

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

County Librarian Susan Simpson arranged for Richard Waters to interview various community leaders. The highlights of the interviews follow, in the order they were scheduled.

Tim Sullivan, Chair, Albany County Commission

Commissioner Sullivan explained that because Albany County has minimal mineral deposits, i.e. natural gas and coal, it is a "poor" county in comparison with other counties such as Sweetwater, Sublette, and Teton. Mr. Sullivan also questioned the need for a public library when the University of Wyoming Library was open to the general public. When asked about consolidation of County and City of Laramie services he thought it was a good idea and had, in fact, supported such consolidation

when he served on the County Commission in times past. He said the concept did not attract many supporters.

Pat Gabriel, Commissioner, Albany County Commission

Mr. Gabriel introduced the Special Purpose Tax program, explaining that the debt would be retired sooner than expected and it might be possible to have an election as early as November 2009.¹ Mr. Gabriel thought that a capital project in the \$9 - \$11M range for the Library was reasonable. The Commissioner also thought that one reason for the high turnover of Library employees might be the result of low wages and so many part-time employees. He believes that more full-time staff would be the correct route to take.

Maggie Farrell, Dean of Libraries, University of Wyoming

Ms. Farrell's use of the public library is primarily confined to attending meetings there that are of interest and/or professionally related. She indicated that due to a \$1.5 million cut in the Coe Library's materials budget it will be

¹ Subsequent discussion with others in the County and the City of Laramie supported Mr. Gabriel's understanding. However, the subsequent discussions did indicate that a November 2009 election was very unlikely due to a lack of time for adequate planning, etc.

discontinuing its McNaughton rental book program and this may result in additional use of the public library.

John M. Burman, Chair, Albany County Public Library Foundation Board of Directors

The Foundation's endowment is now about \$1.2 million, quite good considering the decline in stock values of the past several months. Personally, Mr. Burman likes the idea of a totally new library facility in Laramie but thinks that the price tag may be too much. He believes residents would support an expansion of the existing building.

Rebecca Roberts, Chair, Library Board of Trustees

Ms. Roberts believes the present library building is shabby. She is concerned with regard to staffing issues and re-organization (re-organization seems to happen quite often). County budgeting is not consistent in that Library budgets are based upon what the County indicates the revenue will receive; that income does not always materialize. The Library has borrowed from the Library Foundation, no interest loans, still owes several thousand dollars.

At this time there is no one on the Library staff who really knows IT (information technology). The County can, and does help, but has no real knowledge of the Library. IT is Ms. Roberts' second biggest concern.

Jodi Guerin, Mayor, City of Laramie

Mayor Guerin is supportive of the Library. She believes the location is quite good, but the building is not at all in keeping with the character of downtown Laramie. She would like consideration given to incorporating some of the architectural features of the Civic Center facility on Garfield Street into a new library. She would like a new building to have a “living room” concept, perhaps with a fireplace and/or fountain, and lots of windows. She also indicated that the City had significant infrastructure needs and that she was of the opinion that the City would want their Specific Purpose Tax funds to help defray the costs of the infrastructure improvements, e.g. water and sewer repairs. However, Mayor Guerin did voice the opinion that you should not “bury” all of your improvements.

Paul Heimer, Executive Director, Albany County Public Library Foundation

The consultant explored with Mr. Heimer how the Foundation functions and if he thought it would be in a position to help with funding library improvements via a capital campaign. Mr. Heimer thought it could help although he thought a goal of \$500,000 might be the maximum amount.

Janie Jordan, City Manager, City of Laramie

Ms. Jordan said that a study of the Civic Center is probably one year away. The 2000 US Census undercounted the City of Laramie.

A Library of 30,000 to 34,000 square feet does not seem unreasonable, nor does a cost of \$9 to \$12 million. However, the City does have significant infrastructure needs.

Larry Struempf, President, Friends of the Albany County Public Library

Mr. Struempf wanted to know what the consultants had learned and what our impressions were with regard to the Laramie Library facility. Mr. Waters provided Mr. Struempf with the requested information; stressing that his (Waters) thoughts regarding the building were his and his alone.

Gaye Stockman, Executive Director, Laramie Economic Development Corporation

Ms. Stockman indicated, via a telephone interview, that the University of Wyoming (UW) is the primary economic development factor in Laramie, providing the largest employment base as well as the students. However, the UW is not the only element of economic development in Laramie and the County. Ms. Stockman indicated:

- In the last few months there has been a meaningful increase in inquiries from high tech companies now based in California wanting to re-locate; they see Laramie as a very favorable location due to the UW and the proximity to Cheyenne
- The governor of Wyoming held a two-day workshop on wind energy and there is potential for manufacturing and related jobs stemming from the building of “wind farms”
- The recently opened Conference Center and hotel will make Laramie more attractive for business meetings and tourism.

Laramie City Councilpersons, Interviews via Telephone

Joe Shumway

The present library is adequate. New roof, air conditioning, elevator are recent improvements. He would not support a library project being on the Specific Purpose Tax ballot. Laramie needs \$85M for water and sewer improvements. Water and sewer is an enterprise fund, thus rates support the water and sewer services.

Wyoming is in good shape with only 4 percent unemployment. Coal and gas revenues are down, however. State of Wyoming used to operate on ½ billion \$, now \$2 billion. State will remain healthy but will not filter down to counties and towns. It will be five years before improvements in economic issues are seen.

Library staff has doubled in size since Mr. Shumway has been on the Council (now in his 14th year). The Library should live within its means and not add staff or give raises when the private sector cannot do that.

Scott Mullner

Councilman Mullner does use and donates money to the Library. “Every city should have a good library.” He uses the Coe Library for reference needs.

The present public library is “not exemplary, not laid out real well, looks like a 60s structure, Laramie should have a better library.”

He cannot be certain of the future. “There a lot more pressing needs now (than a new library). A \$2 to \$3 million project might be doable, not a \$10 million project.”

He would favor a renovated, two-story, old style of building. The present facility is not the Laramie style. He does like the location, and would not be in favor of it moving east.

The Library is used a lot for meetings. It is walking distance of some schools, and it is “in my ward.”

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Focus group discussions were held with the following:

- Adult Users of the Library;
- Daycare Providers;
- Friends of the Library and Library Foundation Board Members;
- Senior Citizens; and
- Teens.

How Do You Use the Library?

The use made of the downtown Laramie Library was as varied as the participants.

Some indicated they used it for professional work while for others it was strictly for leisure reading and pleasure. Several reported they borrowed the different media formats, especially the DVD movies and books-on-CD.

For others it was bringing their own, or other children, to the library for programs such as the Summer Reading Challenge, use of the computers in the Children's area, or for home schooling assistance.

Interlibrary loan was another oft mentioned use.

What are the Positives of the Library?

The staff of the Library was referenced often – friendly, knowledgeable, and helpful.

Children's programs were seen as another positive, as is the Interlibrary Loan service and the fact that the meeting room is available for non-Library groups to reserve and use.

The County Library in downtown Laramie is, due to its location, viewed very much as a community-gathering center.

What are the Negatives of the Library?

A negative repeated a number of times in varying ways could best be summarized by the belief that the building is too small. Not being open every day of the week was another negative mentioned several times.

Parking, or rather the inadequacy of the amount of parking, was another minus.

And while the central location was stated as a positive, the amount of landscaping surrounding the building, especially on the 8th Avenue side, is experienced as unappealing. This, coupled with the age and the style of the facility, results in the opinion that the Library is not an attractive part of downtown Laramie.

Suggested Improvements

A larger building would address several different suggested improvements. For instance, age groups could be separated in the Children's area, private areas for study would be possible, as would an increase in the number of public use computers.

More space would also allow for more seating, a toddlers corral area, a coffee bar, more meeting spaces, and a place for small group classes and instruction.

More parking is another improvement voiced by many, as was increased hours of service.

Think of the Library as a Person. How Would You Describe the Library?

Dated, old and worn out, a little run down, thrifty, adaptable, friendly and inviting.

Why are there not More Users of the Library?

The overriding reason can be summed up in three words – lack of marketing. In the opinion of the focus group participants too many people either have no real knowledge of the services and materials the Library has, or have the misplaced idea that it is only a place with books and for children.

Several who voiced reasons for non-use also mentioned inadequate parking.

Other Comments

If a new building is considered, it should be in the middle of town, not in the far eastern section of the city (with Wal-Mart and the Recreation Center) and not in the western part off Laramie.

There appears to be very high staff turnover.

Close Garfield Street and connect the Library with the Civic Center building.

We appreciate all that the Library has done for us.

LIBRARY SERVICES RESPONSE RANKINGS

The Public Library Association (PLA), a division of the American Library Association (ALA), developed and made available to libraries throughout the country a list of services that could be used by individual libraries to develop priorities for services.

Godfrey's Associates has used the PLA document numerous times with libraries on other planning projects. We have found the responses from the focus group participants to be beneficial as we determine what we believe the service priorities of a particular public library can be.

Using a ranking system that allocates five points for a participant's number one service, four points for the second ranked service, on through one point for the fifth ranked service, we can score the responses and determine how the participants rank the services that they believe their library should focus upon.

We also asked the participants to choose two services that, regardless of how good they think those two services might be, it would be their opinion that their library should not invest any time or funding on trying to deliver those two services. The least popular services were indicated on the form via an X.

For Albany County's Laramie Library the top five services were:

- 1 *Current Titles and Topics:*** Having ample copies of books and media in current demand.
- 2 *General Information:*** Having electronic and print information on a wide variety of topics, but not striving to have in-depth coverage on any one or group of topics.

- 3 *Commons:*** Serving as a place where residents of the community can come together for meetings on a host of topics, as well as programs of interest.
- 4 *Lifelong Learning* and *Basic Literacy* (tied):** Lifelong Learning would involve a collection of resources and programs that enable a person to continue learning on whatever topic, or topics, the library would have in its collection. Basic Literacy can be manifested via a collection of materials for persons learning to read and/or a partnership with another organization whereby the library serves as a place for tutors and tutoring.

As for the least favored services:

Formal Learning Support: Having materials that are directly related to the curriculum of local schools and/or colleges/universities.

Business and Career Information: Developing an in-depth business resource collection plus a wide variety of information about careers.

Chapter 11: A Program of Service provides additional information. See the Library Service Response Rankings chart on page 11.5 and Table 11.1, Summary of Library Service Response Rankings, on page 11.6.