

Massachusetts Public Library Construction Program

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 construction or renovation of a public library. Since its inception, the program has awarded 332 grants totaling over \$356 million.



For 30 years 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.



Massachusetts Libraries
BOARD OF LIBRARY COMMISSIONERS

H I G H L I G H T S

of Public Library Design

Exterior



What Works

- Location that is visible and recognizable from the road
- Separation of vehicle and pedestrian traffic patterns
- One story building for 15,000-18,000 sq ft of building or less
- One parking space per 400 gross sq ft of building in addition to staff spaces
- Covered entries to protect from weather
- Parking lot well oriented to entrance

What Doesn't Work

- Multiple public entrances
- Steep roofs that dump snow on walkways and people
- Sites that are oddly shaped or cramped; in a park; or on a high windswept hill out of town
- No place to store snow
- No way to screen dumpster
- Flat roofs
- Stucco exterior finishes

Main Entrances/Lobbies and Circulation Areas

- Vestibule with an air lock
- Large bulletin board and generous room for pamphlets, tax forms, etc
- Visibility of main service point, main staircase, elevator, path to children's room, rest rooms, and meeting room entrance, from the entry
- Space and connections for self-checkout units
- Mobile and flexible desks and furnishings

- Columns that obstruct views from public service desks or "grow" in width for design reasons
- North facing main entrances that never thaw
- Areas that create wind tunnels
- Large, inflexible built-in service desks

Children and Teen Rooms

- Children's rooms that have:
 - Well-defined and separate preschooler and older children's areas
 - Computers located in areas where preschoolers don't have easy access
 - Enough storage for an accumulation of craft supplies, etc.
 - Good sight lines from service points
 - Room for self-check out units
- Teen rooms that are:
 - Designed with teen input
 - Easily and discretely monitored from service desks
 - Teen friendly furnished
 - Clearly separate from children's rooms
- Children and teen rooms that are conveniently located and out of traffic flow

- 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
- Rooms without windows
- Use of solid doors with no glazing anywhere (except family restroom)
- Creating children's and teen rooms adjacent to quiet areas



Meeting and Quiet Study Rooms



- Large meeting rooms that:
 - Have entrances visible from main desk
 - Are located adjacent to rest rooms
 - Offer after hours access
 - Have convenient and adequate storage for tables, chairs, and AV equipment
 - Can be darkened for projection
 - Have a HVAC with separate controls that runs quietly
 - Have at least one set of double entry doors
- Glazing in all interior doors
- Enough small quiet study rooms that meet demand and can be easily monitored

- Large meeting rooms that:
 - Are isolated from the rest of the library
 - Have entrance and kitchen located so that activity in and around them distracts audiences and speakers
 - Do not have appropriate security for art exhibits
 - Inadequate lighting for speakers and art exhibits
- Columns that obstruct views
- Have inadequate or inconvenient storage
- Lack of soundproofing between rooms and adjacent spaces
- Glass box "fishbowls"

Rest Rooms

- Visibility from main desk and entry
- Floor drains, even in single toilets
- Changing tables, including in men's room
- Children's toilet or family restrooms that is located in children's room; visible to staff; and that has standard sized fixtures

What Doesn't Work

- 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, and Doors

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



- Too many oddly placed windows
- Glare from windows and skylights on computer screens
- Inoperable windows
- Lack of glazing in doors into office spaces, meeting rooms, story hour rooms, etc.
- Leaky skylights
- Skylights placed over valuable collections, equipment, or furnishings
- Too many windows
- Windows requiring expensive window treatments
- Exposing collections to excessive sunlight

Lighting

- 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

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

Ramps and Elevators

- Ramps and public entrances that meet ADA requirements
- Elevators, not lifts
- Elevators that are visible from main desk and convenient to meeting rooms

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



Other Elements for a Well-Designed Public Library

- Flexibility to change with evolving needs
- Safe, secure, and accessible environment 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
- 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
- Complicated/noisy HVAC systems and lighting controls
- Dark shelving (black/brown/navy) and other dark surfaces that show dust
- "Reading gardens" that require maintenance
- Spiral staircases
- Walls that don't meet the ceiling
- Roof access via ships' ladders – difficult to climb

If you want to build a library that will serve your community well into the future, flexibility is the key. Nobody knows what a library will be like in 10, 20, or 50 years, but we expect our buildings to last at least that long.

Use flexible principles as your starting point when designing library services and the spaces that facilitate them.

Library Director's To-Do List

- Remember: no building is perfect
- Expect delays
- Actively participate in discussions including construction and design meetings
- 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 and dated notes
- Retain all as-built drawings for future reference
- Organize and keep all warranties and instructions

What We Do

1. Administer grants for library facility improvement, including

- Planning & Design grants
- Construction grants

2. Support libraries throughout the grant process, including

- Assistance with grant applications
- How to work with architects and OPMs (Owner's Project Managers)
- Support for planning activities
- Work with trustees
- Design assistance and review throughout the process
- Help with navigating state law compliance

3. Assist libraries with facility-related planning and construction projects

- All questions welcome, whether for state-funded projects or other
- Plan/project review
- Design principles, philosophy & best practices
- Design Thinking

4. Workshops and conference presentations on all of the above

For more information

on public library design visit the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioner's website:

www.mass.gov/mblc

or contact:

1-800-952-6403 (in-state) (617) 725-1860 (617) 725-0140 (fax)

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