

Random thoughts on 21st century libraries

Background: Watertown is a community of about 33,000 people that borders Boston, Cambridge, Newton, Waltham, and Belmont. We are on an MBTA bus route (bus stop is in front of our building). We are part of the Minuteman Library Network consortium of 42 metro Boston libraries that all share materials.

The Watertown Free Public Library dates back to 1867, and initially operated out of a room in Town Hall. The original library building was constructed in 1884. The library had an extensive modernization/renovation/addition in 2006, though the old building was retained as part of the architecture.

Mission Statement

The Watertown Free Public Library extends beyond its walls to connect people to ideas, information, education, creative opportunities, and to each other. While preserving the rich history of Watertown, the WFPL embraces the advancement of library service, inspires personal development, and promotes community. The library provides free recreation, entertainment, and enrichment. It welcomes and serves everyone.

Physical Plant: The renovated library was beautifully conceived – it's very open and is flooded with natural light. The first floor houses discrete Children's and Teen Rooms. They both flow off of the main lobby, but have doors which can be closed if noise is an issue. The Children's Room also features its own program room, and a Circulation Staff member staffs a Circulation Desk IN the Children's Room so the kiddos can be kept safe and contained in that one space for nearly everything. The WFPL has both an Unattended Children Policy (no one under 10 can be left in the library unattended) **and** an Unattended Adult Policy, which prevents adults who are not with a child from hanging out in the Children's or Teen Rooms. [You can go in to retrieve an item, but you can't hang out in there.] The first floor also features a Cafe (VERY popular) and the Circulation Desk.

The Second Floor holds all Adult materials, Periodicals, Local History, Administrative Offices, and Project Literacy.

Community Space: The library was built with what we thought would be sufficient communal use space. The demand has turned out to be incredibly higher than we anticipated and it grows every year. Here's what we have for spaces:

- 3 Study Rooms in the Adult Area
 - Each has a table, 4 chairs, and a white board.
 - These can be reserved for 2 hours per day, and up to 4 weeks in advance.
- Study Room in the Teen Area
 - With a table and 4 chairs
- Program Room in the Children's Room, dedicated to Children's programming.
- 3 Community Meeting Rooms:
 - 1 seats 10-12
 - 1 seats 20 and has a full wall white board, a ceiling-mounted projector, and room-darkening

shades. The tables in this room are equipped with outlets, so this is our defacto room for computer classes, as well.

- 1 seats up to 200. This room has a pantry with running water, a large screen, a ceiling-mounted HD projector, a high quality surround sound system, a cable-enabled large screen television, and T-coil looping for the hearing impaired. It is also equipped with a partition that can divide it in half.

Our policies state that none of our rooms are to be used for for-profit endeavors. So paid tutors should not be using the study rooms, and a real-estate company can't charge people to hold real-estate seminars in our meeting rooms. Meetings must be "free and open to the public." Of course, we use the meeting rooms a lot for library programs, as well.

There is constant demand for all of our spaces, and **if we could add anything to our library, it would be more meeting- and study rooms.** For example, when I joined the library in January of 2011, we booked approximately 2600 study room reservations, but we booked over 5200 in the fiscal year that just ended. Competition is fierce.

Technology:

Technology is not static. We are constantly updating our infrastructure and offerings. Not only does the technology itself evolve, but the community's needs shift over time. When we started circulating e-readers and tablets 6 years ago, most people checked them out to see what they were all about and learn how to use them. Now people check them out to take with them on vacation, as they have a pre-loaded library of about 150 current bestsellers and classics, so they can always find something they want to read. No one checks them out to learn how to use them anymore. Similarly, we used to have a constant demand for basic computer classes. No one comes to those any more, but people still flock to the more specific (ie, how to stream/download from the library) or job-oriented classes.

What do we offer for technology at this moment in time? So much!

- 26 public computers in the Adult Department
- 10 public computers in the Teen Room
- 3 public computers and a bunch of ipads and laptops in the Children's Room. They removed a bunch of their desktops this year to make room for other things in favor of the laptops.
- About 30 laptops available for checkout/use within the library
- Headphones available for checkout/use within the library
- Charging cables for most popular devices for checkout/use within the library
- A dedicated device charging station on the 2nd floor (Adult Dept)
- A solar-powered charging station in front of the library (built by volunteers in our Makerspace)
- Free WIFI and a secure WIFI network throughout the building
- 3 high-quality, bookedge scanners capable of scanning to email, google drive, usb drive, or a printer.
- 2 immense-screen iMacs loaded with creative software – Adobe Creative Suite, Garage Band, etc. in the Adult Department
- A large-screen iMac in the Teen Room loaded with audio and video editing tools
- AWE Early Learning Station in the Children's Room
- A microfilm station equipped with ViewScan software, capable of digitally enhancing images to get the best possible scan of the source material-which is often pretty rough.
- 2 tethered iPads in the Periodicals Room for in-library use. These are loaded with a variety of

- apps, Kindle read titles, and Zinio magazines for browsing
- Circulating eReaders and iPads, including Kindle Fires, Voyages, Paperwhites, and Apple iPads. All of them are loaded with about 150 titles comprising a mix of bestsellers and classics, and are updated with new titles every 3 months.
- Assistive technologies:
 - Zoomtext on all public computers
 - JAWS on all public computers
 - Kurzweil text-to-speech on one computer
 - TTY Line
 - Full-sized Optalec Reader (it's a large backlit magnifier for the visually impaired)
 - A portable Optalec Reader
 - T-coil looping for the hearing impaired in our largest meeting room

Digital Collections:

Obviously, we offer e-books and e-audiobooks to our library patrons via Overdrive. We also subscribe to The Commonwealth Ebook Collection (Massachusetts only), Hoopla (for streaming movies and music), and Zinio (digital magazines). All of these services are popular, and the usage stats just keep growing and growing.

In addition to the importance of digital collection development, we also have been working diligently to digitize materials in our Local History collection for several reasons:

1. Digitization allows us to mount popular items on the website for easy access for patrons all over the world who would like to do research using our materials.
2. Digitization allows us to build interactive experiences on our two large touchscreens in the library, so patrons can explore the history of Watertown, and interact with items from our collection. We purchased Intuiface software, which enables us to create interactive experiences on a timeline. It's been relatively easy to work with, and our patrons are engaging with our local history materials and learning about Watertown's history, while having fun on our touchscreen displays. It's been a huge hit!
3. Digitization allows us to preserve the original materials longer, by minimizing the handling they receive when we enable people to interact with the digital images instead.

In 2016, we restructured the Adult/Reference Department to include a full-time Digital Librarian who develops and maintains these collections.

Programs:

Programming is how we reach out to the community and bring them within our walls. We want the library to be a community meeting place, a learning place, a place where people connect and grow. Obviously, we host book groups and run reading programs (Summer Reading, and our annual One Book, One Watertown community read). But we do so much more.

We host events that are purely social in nature: Trivia nights and Paint nights, for example.

We host programs that are intended to get people moving and learning about their bodies, as well as their minds: Weekly yoga, bi-monthly T'ai Chi, occasional Zumba, as well as many one-off programs we've held.

We host programs to foster civic engagement: Our “Democracy Talks” lecture series touches on many of the most pressing issues of the day. We have also hosted the MA chapter of the National Lawyer's Guild's Street Law Clinics on Civil Disobedience, Stop and Search Law, and Immigration Law.

We host programs to preserve Watertown's history: Genealogical research programs and historical lectures, for example.

We host programs to connect patrons to the arts: Every Monday night is Movie Monday. We make popcorn and show a film on our big screen. This is one of our most popular offerings. When we can, we make connections to things going on in the world, or to “read more about it” offerings in our collection. We also produce a Winter Concert Series on Sunday afternoons from December through March each year. We have an art gallery on our 2nd floor; our exhibits feature local artists and change monthly.

We host programs to help solve problems: Our town Social Worker holds open office hours in the library twice per month to let people know what services are available to them. An immigration lawyer in town volunteers one night per month for a drop-in clinic in the library to answer immigration questions. We host a weekly Drop-in Tech Help session where folks can bring their e-readers or laptops or smartphones if they need a little one-on-one attention to figure out how to navigate their device.

Please note that all of the above require space. We need meeting rooms of all shapes and sizes, and are often constrained in our ability to schedule programming by the lack of available space.

We also do a variety of work outside of the library building, including

- Outreach at the Farmer's Market
- School outreach and visits by Children's Librarians
- Makerspace! The WFPL developed and maintains the HATCH Makerspace at another location in town. HATCH is a place where community members can come together to collaborate, invent, create, teach, and learn. We have a variety of materials and tools available at HATCH, including sewing machines, soldering irons, arduinos, laser cutters, 3-D printing, computers for coding, and more!

Welcoming people to the community:

Project Literacy helps people attain English language literacy. Most of our clients are English Language Learners, but some are native English speakers who need help with reading and/or writing. Project Literacy just celebrated their 30th anniversary, and offers English Language classes, one-on-one tutoring, and drop-in conversation groups. Project Literacy also works with a number of organizations within the community to host quarterly community potluck dinners so their students can mix and mingle and become more deeply engaged in the community.

So many people find their way to the library because they heard they could learn English, and then become some of our most consistent library users for many years to come.

And continuing to serve them:

We offer homebound delivery service for those who can no longer come to the library.

This is the tip of the iceberg: I'm sure I've forgotten many things.

So what do I think a library needs to consider going into the next 25 years?

- A physical plant that will allow for all of the community meetings, classes, concerts, and hoe-downs you can imagine, and then some.
- A physical plant that enables you to keep kids and teens separate for safety and noise abatement reasons.
- A robust technological infrastructure, with sufficient staffing commitment to maintain, tweak, and adapt it as needs evolve.
- A cafe if possible, because **FOOD KEEPS PEOPLE IN THE BUILDING**. Seriously, no one wants to go out to find lunch when they're in the middle of something.
- Long hours! We live in a 24/7 world. The internet never sleeps. People work long hours, and have to fit in their reading, program attendance, etc when they have a tiny bit of free time. Expectations have changed and public libraries need to keep up!! We are not a big city library but we keep pretty long hours:
 - M-Th 9-9
 - F 9-7
 - Sat 9-5
 - Sun 1-5
- An eagerness/willingness/undying commitment to **GROWING** and **CHANGING** as the community and technology grows and changes. No resting on laurels.

My Assistant Director used to have these words written on her whiteboard:

“Yes, and here's how...”

This was so important and meaningful for me. We need to approach everything as a thrilling new challenge, and commit to the fact that we can't know what tech we'll need down the road. People and facilities need to be flexible enough to shift with the changing tides.

Access to information, that's my mantra. I don't care if it's in a dusty old vellum book handwritten in 1630 or digital information in a database updated last week: my job is to find