TRUMBULL LIBRARY SYSTEM
Main Library-Quality Street
Space Analysis

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A. Project Overview

Trumbull Library retained Library Development Solutions in 2015 to complete a strategic plan and evaluate and recommend facility improvements at the Main Library on Quality Street. The impetus for both projects was the Library Trustees’ desire to anticipate future service delivery needs. In addition, ongoing conversations in Trumbull pertaining to potentially building a senior center/library campus in a new location further informed these plans.

Built in 1974, the Trumbull Library covers 30,440 square feet primarily on one main level and a mezzanine. An expansion in 2000 added a new children’s wing, and regular modifications to the original 1974 space have included space to accommodate public computing, a teen area, and more seating. Aside from the children’s area, there has been no major expansion of the building since 1974.

Library buildings are typically planned for a 25-year lifespan. Those constructed during the late 1960s and early 1970s reflect the service approach that was current at the time. In 1974, libraries were built to accommodate growing collections of books and other contemporary formats, research and study, and day-to-day transactions like checkout and return of library material. Most planners could not have foreseen the technological changes that have occurred in the 41 years since the Trumbull Library first opened.

The Trumbull Library staff, supported by its Board of Trustees, has done an admirable job of adapting its building to incorporate technological change, but it’s now time to consider major modifications to keep up with the community’s demand for changing services. In every library’s life cycle there comes a time when planners—trustees, staff, community and municipal leaders—need to assess the building’s capacity to support the next 25 years; now is that time for the Trumbull Library.

This facilities assessment is based on several observations:

1) The changing nature of library service and collections;
2) Community ideas and suggestions pertaining to the Trumbull Library obtained through survey responses, focus groups, and a town meeting;
3) An onsite evaluation of the Main Library by the consultants;
4) Recommendations in the strategic plan that will impact the library facility; and
5) A comparison of the Main Library to neighboring and other libraries to determine space and design deficits.

Based on each of these factors, Library Development Solutions recommends the following with regard to the library’s physical plant; each option is explained in more detail in this report:
Option 1: Keep the Main Library in its current location. The combination of the town hall, library, and shopping center make this location the town center. The library is conveniently located for residents from all parts of town.

Option 2: Reconfigure the library/town hall campus to expand parking, improve traffic flow, and provide space for modest library growth.

Expand the existing library along the “western” elevation to provide additional space for community meetings, small group meetings, additional seating and collaboration space, an enlarged teen area, and improved collection display.

Repurpose and reconfigure the existing space to make it more welcoming, modern, and functional. This includes:

- Redesign of the checkout and return area;
- A redesigned entrance and lobby with a café and small used book store;
- Redesign of the first floor large print browsing and new book areas;
- New service desks; and
- A smaller, consolidated collection, preferably all on one level

Option 3: Assess the potential to remove the mezzanine and raise the roof to add a fully functional second story.

Option 4: Demolish the 1974 building and build a new one at the existing location.

B. The Evaluation Process

Leslie and Alan Burger toured the Trumbull Library on several occasions to observe customer interaction and use of the space, evaluate facility conditions, and develop short- and long-term recommendations for improving the library. The results of this assessment are detailed in this report.

Libraries Have Changed

Libraries have changed significantly in the last five years, prompted in part by the growing availability of digital content and the affordability of related devices. Almost everyone has access to a computer in his or her pocket or pocketbook, in their school or library. Information has become ubiquitous and reference is no longer the centerpiece of library service.

People are reading in different ways, consuming both print and digital content in almost equal numbers. Ten years ago, almost everyone on a commuter train carried newspapers; today, most everyone consumes their daily news via their smart phone or tablet. Libraries are no longer warehouses or storage facilities for print materials, but
Instead dynamic community centers and intergenerational gathering spots that provide popular collections of material, programming to satisfy all interests and engage people in new ways, centers for digital learning and technology, and communal spaces that invite people to find a comfortable reading or work spot.

The 2008 recession also accelerated changes for libraries since many people who lost their jobs never returned to the traditional workforce, choosing instead to start home-based businesses, or become freelancers. Today's workforce is more mobile, untethered to a company or desk, and without a traditional office, what better place could there be but a library for someone who needs space to think and create?

Social media has made us less social in some ways. The ability to be in touch with a friend or relative any time and any place is wonderful, and at the same time people are increasingly seeking face-to-face opportunities to explore ideas, have conversations, and form friendships. Libraries, schools, and other public institutions have an increasingly important role to play in community engagement.

The patron relationship with staff has changed as well. Customers prefer to find their way around the library on their own, but may want personal assistance from a staff member to be readily available. The staff member is no longer the sole source of information expertise, but instead has become a partner in learning and discovery, a guide to information that cannot be seen and may not be easily found online. Large service desks are a thing of the past, replaced instead by approachable, small-scale desks that are welcoming to all.

All of these changes have immediate implications for the design of library space.

- Space previously allocated for extensive reference collections can be reduced and repurposed. Much of this information is freely available online or through digital subscription databases licensed to the library.

- Dense stack cores that accommodated growing collections of books can be reduced or eliminated. Collection size can be reduced to remain fresh, and reflective of community needs and interests. Face-out book displays and a more user-friendly collection will help customers find what they need.

- Service desks can shrink to enable more collaboration between staff and customers; hip-to-hip service becomes the new norm.

- The number of desktop personal computers can be reduced as the library provides mobile devices—laptops, chrome books, tablets—that enable people to work anywhere thanks to a robust, fast wireless connection.

- Technology instruction will remain an important part of the library’s service program as library staff and outside instructors provide group classes and
individual assistance with personal devices, as well as in the use of the library’s digital content.

- Institutional furniture can be replaced with more comfortable chairs, living-room-style seating, and mobile furnishings. Table seating can be supplemented with collaborative workspaces, small meeting rooms, and co-working spaces. Library space moves from immobile to mobile and flexible.

- Quiet space is in great demand. Creating a “quiet only” zone with comfortable tables and seating will attract those seeking space to support their work and study needs.

- Café service will become the norm as libraries recognize the need to provide coffee, tea and other snacks to meet the community’s need for a place to meet a friend, have a conversation, or get a bite to eat when a study break is needed.

- Librarians will increasingly harness the power of technology to deal with routine transactions so staff can provide more one-on-one service. Self-check kiosks, self-service hold pick-ups, and mobile apps that enable customers to customize reading lists or find a specific shelf location will become the norm.

- Programming for all ages will attract new audiences to the library and provide new opportunities for engagement. The library will play an essential role in community building and civic engagement.

- Technology access and instruction, both for groups and one-on-one, will be an important driver in the design of library space. Libraries can be the first place the patrons stop when they want to learn how to use a new app, need assistance applying for work using an online interface, or want to increase their computer proficiency.

- Children and teens are the future of public libraries. The positive experiences that children and their parents have in the library will ensure that they remain lifelong library supporters. Engaging teens in meaningful programs and providing them with dedicated space is another way to build leadership skills and prepare them for the future. Providing engaging, age-appropriate programs for children and teens is an essential part of every library’s service objective.

- Outdoor, pedestrian-friendly space is also important to the overall library experience. The ability to host a program outside, stage a large event, and increase visibility to those passing by will generate excitement about the library.

- Revenue-producing space is also an important consideration in today’s libraries. Supplemental income that augments tax support is increasingly important to many libraries. A well-designed and carefully curated used book sale can
generate thousands of dollars each year. A small retail shop that sells reading-related gifts could be co-located near the checkout desk.

C. Community Feedback about the Trumbull Library

A series of focus groups, a town meeting, and community-wide survey in 2015 provided useful information to consider when planning space improvements to the Trumbull Library.

515 of the 1,288 people who responded to the community survey indicated that they visit other libraries on a regular basis, ranked below in order of their popularity.

- Fairfield Public Library (38%)
- Wheeler Memorial Library, Monroe (27%)
- Bridgeport Public Library (18%)
- Westport Library (18%)
- Stratford Public Library (14%)
- Easton Public Library (8%)

Among the reasons cited for those visits were:

- Availability of cooking and art lessons
- Free DVD rentals
- A beautiful facility (Monroe)
- Better Wi-Fi
- Author visits (Westport)
- Better availability of desired books with a shorter wait list

Focus group and town meeting participants offered the following suggestions:

- Improve parking
- Expand the library’s top level so it encompasses the entire space, make it a true second floor
- Remove ramps and install elevators
- Offer more space for elementary and middle school children
- Create a makers’ space along with dedicated space for tutoring
- Offer more modern furniture, including more comfortable chairs and tables
- Designate space for quiet study
- Make the interior spaces lighter and brighter
- Create small meeting rooms to support collaborative work
- Open a cafe
- Expand the community room and improve performance space
- Create a catering kitchen to support events
- Design an outdoor reading patio
• Improve the teen area

D. Trumbull Library Space Assessment Recommendations

1. General Considerations

The Trumbull Library is centrally located. Although the town lacks a traditional “Main Street”, the library’s proximity to the town hall, a major shopping area, and the post office make it a convenient stop while people go about their daily routines.

Although library parking is adequate it is often limited due to overflow from the municipal building. Parking could be expanded for the library and town offices by rethinking the on-site traffic flow; parking municipal vehicles in another adjacent location or even building a small garage that would provide increased capacity.

The library is welcoming and attractive with seasonal plantings and a beautifully landscaped site that provides a lovely setting upon approaching the building and great window views for those working inside.

It isn’t until one enters the library that it is apparent that the building was constructed for a different era of library service.

2. Recommendations for Building Improvements

The consultants offer several options regarding the Trumbull Library. We believe that a combination of Options 1 and 2 provide a reasonable path to creating a functional, attractive, and welcoming library to serve Trumbull residents. Option 3 requires additional study and cost analysis as does Option 4.

Option 1: Keep the Main Library in its current location

The combination of the town hall, library, and shopping center make Quality Street the de facto town center. The library is conveniently located and easy for residents from all parts of town to reach. It appears that there is ample acreage to redesign the campus to accommodate an enlarged library, expanded parking, and improved traffic flow that will meet the functional needs of both facilities. The Town and Library should engage the services of a traffic consultant to assess current campus conditions and develop recommendations that will meet the community’s needs for the next 25 years.

Option 2: Reconfigure, expand, and repurpose the library at its current location to make it more welcoming, modern, and functional

Though the 1974 library has been well maintained over the years, it needs to be renovated to accommodate the way in which people use libraries today. This means additional meeting space: an enlarged community room, small collaboration rooms
to accommodate 2-6 people, conference rooms that can be used for in-house meetings or offered for rental, and a new technology training center. Added new space along the existing building’s western facade would accommodate these needs and enable the library staff to gain additional space by rearranging the collection along the interior perimeter.

In addition, existing space on the main and mezzanine levels should be renovated and reconfigured to provide for more seating, a dedicated space for teens, a technology center, a new quiet reading area, and a new service desk.

The consultants recommend a large addition along the entire side of the library’s western facade, updating all mechanical systems to improve energy efficiency, and an evaluation of the building structure to identify other needed structural improvements.

The Library Trustees should engage an architect and an engineer to conduct a feasibility study on what renovations can be supported given the structural limitations of the existing building and changes in building codes.

**Option 3: Remove the mezzanine level and add a fully functional second story**

Conceptually this would seem like an easy way to solve the library’s space problem, but before considering this option the Library Board would need an architect to determine whether this is structurally possible. Previous studies indicate that the mezzanine and the stacks below provide structural integrity to the building. If an engineer determines that is the case and no modification is possible, then serious consideration should be given to removing both floors of the mezzanine and stack area and then rebuilding and expanding west of that space. Continuing to work around the poorly designed stack core will limit the library’s space options.

**Option 4: Demolish the 1974 building and rebuild a new library at the existing location**

This may seem drastic, but after considering the costs of renovation and expansion and bringing an old facility up to current building code, it may be less expensive to demolish and rebuild a new library, plus the new facility can be adapted for many uses.

3. **Recommendations to Improve the Library’s Existing Space**

The following recommendations can be considered in combination with the expansion and renovation option detailed in Option 2 or as a separate project. Some are low-cost, high-impact solutions that would begin to demonstrate what the Library Trustees and staff hope to achieve with a larger, full-scale renovation/expansion project.

3.1 **Exterior Entrance, Lobby and Community Room**
Automatic doors create an easy entry into a small lobby that provides a transition from the outside to the library's interior. The lobby has a few seats, but is not the type of space where a patron would spend time since it is not climate controlled. A small display case showcases changing exhibits and a bulletin board announces upcoming events both in the library and the community.

The public restrooms are in the lobby. Although clean, the restrooms need to be modernized, including new tile; new self-flushing, water-saving toilets; new sinks and counters with low-flow faucets; and environmentally friendly and dryers. These restrooms must serve both the library and the Hawley Community Meeting Room and are undersized.

The lobby should incorporate a better display area for giveaways and library promotional material.

3.1.a Bump out the entrance to create more usable lobby space and a better transition into the library. There appears to be ample room to extend the entrance out to the sidewalk edge. An enlarged, climate-controlled lobby could then be redesigned to provide space for a café and casual seating. Café services should be provided through a contractual arrangement with a local vendor.
The lobby should also function as a gathering and transition space for those attending events in the meeting room.

3.1.b Restrooms should be redesigned and renovated to accommodate additional usage and incorporate self-flushing toilets, automatic faucets and soap dispensers, and environmental friendly hand dryers.

3.1.c Digital displays in the newly renovated lobby can be easily programmed and updated to provide up-to-the-minute information about what is going on in the library each day.

3.1.d The Library’s Hawley Community Meeting Room is too small and often filled to capacity. Enlarging the room to accommodate 200-225 people would provide much-needed space for library programs and other community events.

3.2 Redesign the Interior Library Entrance and Areas for Large Print, New Books, Checkouts, and Returns

A second set of doors (sliders) provides access to the interior library space. Upon entering, there is a sense of spaciousness and openness; upon further inspection, however, one sees that the space lacks visual appeal and any merchandising that can be used to engage patrons.

A large reading area to the left accommodates the large print collection on perimeter shelving. Table seating is scattered throughout the space, but the area lacks a focal point that would invite someone to spend time. This area provides limited display space for new books and an in-house used books sale.

A coin-operated coffee machine is convenient, but doesn’t provide the ambiance of a full service café or the aroma of brewing coffee. This is prime library real estate, the place where first impressions are formed. It could and should be much more dynamic.
New books, which are typically the highest-circulating collection and are what most people want to see when they come into the library, are displayed on wall shelving on the other side of the checkout desk. Although the new book collection is great, lack of merchandising, display fixtures or any spot lighting make it look less than exciting. The current space limits the size of the new book collection and is also awkward because one has to turn a corner to continue browsing the new non-fiction collection. There is no place to sit; thus, an area that should be exciting is not.

The checkout and return area, which is the central service point for this entire area, is oversized for the amount of transactions being handled. All transactions are handled by staff, which promotes good customer relationships, but doesn’t allow for self-checkout or self-service holds, services that Trumbull residents may experience at other neighboring libraries.
3.2.a  Swap the locations of the new books to the area and the large print collection. Purchase new display units that enable the new fiction and non-fiction collection to be displayed on free-standing shelving and display tables similar to a bookstore. Franklin Fixtures (www.franklinfixtures.com) offers moderately priced retail and library fixtures that could enhance this space.

3.2.b  Add several lounge seats or benches in this area that invite customers to stay and read in the library or engage in conversation. A small grouping of chairs and/or benches could also be used for informal book chats. Nienkamper (www.nienkamper.com) or Davis (www.davisfurniture.com) offers the best options. You can also work directly with a furniture jobber like BFI (www.bfionline.com) or an interior designer to help select the best pieces based on your budget. Space permitting, add a counter and counter-height stools for laptop users.

3.2.c  Relocate the in-house used book sale
Work with the Friends to determine the scope and size of the daily book sale. Many libraries realize significant income from their daily and annual used book sales; however, to do so requires significant volunteer time to sort through donations and determine what has sale value. The outcome of that discussion will help determine the location for the sale. If it is to be expanded, the used books need to be marketed and displayed in a high-traffic area of the library to maximize sales. Ideally the sale would be located in close proximity to the new book collection and checkout desk.

3.2.d  Relocate the large print collection to the area now occupied by the new fiction and non-fiction.

3.2.e  Redesign the checkout desk to incorporate self-check kiosks.

3.3  Reimagine the Reference, Magazine, Technology, Adult Collection, and Teen Spaces

A series of ramps and stairs leads to the lower-level area that accommodates the reference desk, technology center, magazine reading area, reference and non-fiction collection, seating for individual and group study, and teen area.

The double-height space is complemented by natural light from large windows around the perimeter, but one is immediately struck by the inefficiency of the space. In the middle of this large space is the stack core: heavy and dense metal shelving in a color that immediately says “1974”, built to house a larger and different type of collection. It is
the dominant feature of the space. The mezzanine level floats in the space providing little usable space for patrons.

The library staff is carefully evaluating and reducing the collection to remove infrequently used or outdated titles, but more is needed, particularly with reference titles and multiple copies of older fiction. Access to digital content through subscription databases and free content on the internet enables library staff to provide excellent reference advice without the burden of managing and housing an expensive physical collection. The stack core’s structural function limits the ability to alter the library’s existing space in a way that will make it more usable for patrons.

Study space and seating is pushed to the perimeter of the lower level. This prevents library staff from creating distinct work zones that would support the functionality needed in today’s library. Library customers are seeking space where they can work quietly and individually, as well as space that enables them to work collaboratively. It may be possible to find furniture solutions that would create new work zones in the existing space.

3.3.a Consolidate the magazine collection.

The magazine reading area provides beautiful and comfortable space for library patrons. There is an opportunity to rethink this space, particularly with the move from print to digital magazines. All magazines should be together in one space; there is currently a small overflow space for magazines on the other side of the lower level. The current subscription list should be evaluated to determine which could be eliminated. Incorporate all magazines into one area, evaluate the current subscription list and retention policy for back issues, and promote Zinio. Replace current seating with more comfortable chairs.
3.3.b  Relocate the service desk.
Move the service desk to where the overflow magazine collection is currently housed. This would create a defined space for the staff and free up the existing space for seating.

3.3.c  Repaint the existing shelving.
Repainting the shelving a calm gray or beige will neutralize the color and make it less of a focal point. Work with a library shelving company to identify inserts or custom options to make it more functional.

3.3.d  Reduce the size of the reference collection.
The library’s reference collection is too large given the changing nature of today’s libraries. Information contained in large, multivolume sets is available through online subscriptions. Government information is readily available for free on the Internet. After the staff reduces the collection size, reclaimed space can be repurposed to showcase popular collections—travel, cookbooks, etc. Depending on the scope of the reduction, consolidate this collection on the lower level.
3.3.e Repurpose the mezzanine. If structurally feasible and remove some of the stacks after the collection has been reduced to create small group study areas or collaboration space for library patrons.

3.3.f Replace existing study carrels with updated furniture that accommodates technology, and provide task lighting. Explore portable power solutions that run under the carpet now available from Steelcase; their Thread product can bring power and data to locations inaccessible to wall outlets. This would enable furniture to “float” in the space.

3.3.g Create a collaboration zone with sofas and tables that encourage people to interact informally.

3.3.h Create a focal point for and reduce the footprint of the DVD and CD collection by utilizing better display units.

3.3.i Redesign the teen area to include more mobile furniture and add low, portable walls to define the space in its current location. Consider the possible relocation of the teen area to the mezzanine and the addition of a Teen librarian. Loan laptops to qualified teen patrons via a laptop cart.
3.4 Update the Children’s Room

This newly added space is attractive and colorful and would benefit from minor improvements to make it more of a destination and more child- and family-friendly.

The large room adjacent to the story time and craft room seems to be underutilized. Fit out this area for toddlers and preschoolers so it becomes a “playroom” and destination for younger children and their parents. The Burgeon Group (burgeongroup.com/literacy-nooks.html) has options for creating imaginative play space. Activity tables from 3Branch (3branch.com/discovery.html) provide opportunities for free play with LEGO. Set up a preschool technology area with iPads loaded with an app of the day. Refresh the Story Room so it is more child-friendly.

D. Conclusion

The Trumbull Library’s Main Library is a much-loved and well-utilized facility. The ability to grow the library’s service program and help people reimagine what a public library can be is limited by the existing physical plant, which needs updating and expansion to meet the community’s needs for the next 25 years. Now is the time to begin planning for the future. An investment in creating great library space will go a long way toward helping the library achieve the goals and objectives outlined in its strategic plan.

Until the library engages the services of an architect to complete a feasibility study for expansion and renovation it is too early to offer a cost estimate for these changes. Library Development Solutions would be pleased to work with you to identify and select qualified architects, develop a request for proposals and evaluate the submissions.