

Haverford Township Free Library – Facility Planning Overview

The Haverford Township Free Library is, by many measures, the busiest library in Delaware County, Pennsylvania. The Library serves a primary service population of nearly 50,000 people from an aging facility of approximately 24,000 gross square feet (GSF). The size of the existing building has been variously reported as being as large as 36,087 square feet (SF) (CICADA, 2003) and as small as 21,000 SF (Bowra, 2003). The CICADA measurement includes unexcavated basement areas as well as other basement areas that are totally unusable in their current, completely unfinished condition. The Bowra measurement appears to be an estimate of potentially usable space.

The Haverford Library is undersized by all measures. If the moderate estimate of 24,000 GSF is used, Haverford is serving the public from a building that offers 0.48 GSF per capita. The State of West Virginia uses a 0.5 GSF per capita standard as a minimum recommended size for a public library. To put things in perspective, the Haverford Library is slightly under the State of West Virginia minimum standard.

Contemporary “rules-of-thumb” cited for the size of public library facilities are usually in the 0.75 GSF per capita range and most new public library facilities built in the past decade have been closer to the 1.0 GSF per capita range. Applying the 0.75 GSF per capita and the 1.0 GSF per capita standards yields a library facility of between 37,500 GSF and 50,000 GSF respectively. Clearly, the Haverford Township Free Library’s space deficiencies are real.

Another measure that illustrates the degree to which the Haverford Library is crowded is the size of its collection of materials. A commonly accepted collection standard (and one that has been used by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania) is 3.0 volumes per capita. The Haverford Free Library houses approximately 132,000 volumes or 2.64 volumes per capita. Even at this reduced number of volumes per capita, the building is overloaded. A commonly used standard suggests that the capacity of a public library can be determined by multiplying gross square feet by 5. Using this measure, the existing Haverford facility has a capacity of 120,000 volumes. The Haverford Library is housing 5.5 volumes per square foot. If it were to attempt to house the 150,000 volumes that would represent 3.0 volumes per capita, the current structure would be housing 6.25 volumes per square foot and would have virtually no seating space whatsoever.

The existing expansion of the old bank building as a public library has been in service since the late 1970s or approximately thirty-five years. Ten years ago (2003), CICADA

Architecture/Planning conducted an “existing conditions” study. One statement from the CICADA report is particularly telling. A decade ago, an assessment of the library building concluded that:

“The interior of the building is dated and not functionally appropriate to the operations of a modern library... the building is operationally locked into a layout that is twenty-five years old and is not flexible or technologically up to date.”

Ten years later, the Library finds itself in much the same position it was a decade ago. In the same year that CICADA conducted the existing conditions study, library consultant Rich Bowra developed a building program statement for the Library that called for a new facility of 42,936 GSF that would house a targeted collection of 177,505 volumes (4.13 volumes per SF). Obviously, this facility never materialized.

Although the need for a considerably larger facility has been clearly documented and, in the professional opinion of this consultant is well justified, multiple efforts to secure a larger space either by building a new library or renovating a larger existing structure in the past have failed. Consequently, the Library engaged Himmel & Wilson, Library Consultants and Casaccio Yu Architects to determine how it might maximize the use of its existing structure. The first of the two building program statements represents this effort.

It should be noted that some significant compromises are required to achieve a reasonable balance between and among spaces for collections, public seating, meeting spaces and staff workspaces. Specifically, adult collection sizes would need to be reduced in size by approximately 6,000 volumes primarily to allow more space for customer seating and for the seated use of the Library’s Wi-Fi network using personal devices (laptops, tablets and smart phones). The program for maximizing the use of the current structure details 19,784 net assignable square feet (NASF). The total building size including restrooms, wall thickness, corridors, etc. is approximately 23,741 building gross square feet (BGSF) of space.

An additional serious deficit has been noted by everyone that has examined the Haverford Library situation. In a highly mobile community, the number of off-street parking spots available for the public is unacceptably low. Typical standards applied to library parking spaces call for one parking space for every 250 SF of library space. Under this standard, the 24,000 GSF existing structure would require 96 parking spaces. The current count is 17. While available on-street parking ameliorates the

situation to some degree, parking is nevertheless an ongoing issue that is simply not addressed by the renovation of the existing building.

Because of this reality, Himmel & Wilson was asked to prepare a second building program document representing an acceptable new facility. The building program statement for a new facility calls for 32,361 net-assignable square feet (NASF) which translates into approximately 38,833 GSF or 0.78 GSF per capita. It should be understood that the 38,833 GSF facility that is detailed in the new facility program is not the “ideal” library for Haverford Township. It is **NOT** a Cadillac or Lexus library. Rather it is the Chevrolet or Hyundai level library.

For example, while the new facility program more than doubles the number of public access computers available, the facility does not include a computer lab for teaching computer skills. It includes a children’s creative play space but not a full early literacy center. In short, the program for a new facility represents a good, serviceable public library that could comfortably house a collection in excess of 175,000 volumes with more than adequate “people” space.

A library of this size could be in a larger facility with other civic functions and, by doing so, some meeting spaces and non-assignable spaces (restrooms, corridors, etc.) could be shared. However, in planning space, 150 off-street parking spaces should be designated for library users.