

Mesa County Libraries | Clifton Needs Assessment Report

Overview

Charge

Based on discussions with Library Director Michelle Boisvenue-Fox, Mesa County Libraries (MCL) seek:

- An assessment of the current Clifton branch, now located at the Mesa Pointe Shopping Center, 590 32 Rd #6-F, Clifton, CO 81520.
- Feedback from library and community stakeholders (through community forums) about what they would like to see in the new location off F Road.
- Recommendations for building size.
- In addition, the library would like some preliminary construction cost estimates.

Activities

The consultant conducted several activities which inform this report:

- Research and analysis of current services through Library Research Service and construction costs based on similar recent projects
- Interviews onsite with Director and Clifton branch staff about branch needs and use patterns
- Four additional community workshops in Clifton to identify library issues, and facilitate community input

Executive Summary

In general, this consultant's recommendations are:

- Maintain the general service profile of MCL, as best expressed in its downtown Grand Junction location.
- Increase public gathering space: 1-2 large meeting spaces, 3-4 smaller spaces.
- Exemplify the best of "green building."
- Focus on early and family literacy, as well as English as a Second Language, for the new branch.
- Construct a branch of at least 20,000 sf, with a target of 25,000 sf.
- Anticipate a square foot cost of \$325. Additional costs for Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipment are currently about \$30/sf. Two **notes**: space over 10,000 sf tends to get cheaper per square foot; some core services like Heating Ventilation and Air-Conditioning are more efficient over a larger volume of space. On the other hand, construction costs tend to rise by 5% per year.
- Consider additional projects outside the library, such as parks, community gardens, etc., as distinct projects, paid for by donations and grants, rather

than included in the above square foot estimates. This is also true for solar panels in the parking lot, and other ideas for outdoor spaces.

- Expect a two-year design and construction timeframe, although construction may be phased in various ways.

Background

MCL is an independently funded library district. The Clifton branch, at approximately 5,400 square feet (sf), currently serves the populations of Clifton (roughly 20,000 people) and Fruitvale (roughly 7,785). Population totals are not based on entire zip code areas (81504 and 81520). Combined, the population is growing at less than 1% per year. Thus the current location offers about .19 sf per capita. (Older planning standards would recommend a range between .5 to 1 foot per capita, or between 2.5 and 5 times as much space as currently available.) MCL has secured a 5 acre parcel within half a mile of the current location. A single acre includes 45,560 square feet; thus the parcel is more than sufficient for a significant expansion of the library, including parking, landscaping, and special outside features (such as a community garden or children's park).

The existing Clifton branch has an exemplary collection, divided almost evenly between adult and children's materials. It continues to circulate DVD's and CD's. Staff spaces are split up into a couple of offices, a break room, and a central circulation desk. There is a compact but well used public computing area, and two very small meeting spaces, one that seats about 12, and another that seats 4. There is also a small teen nook. The general collection of materials is adequate to serve the public, particularly with the ability to pull in materials from elsewhere in the district. The staff includes 5.5 Full Time Equivalents, although they also provide service at other district locations. However, the library lacks public meeting space, and adequate public seating areas. In a location as beautiful as Mesa County, the existing Clifton library offers no other views than a strip mall parking lot.

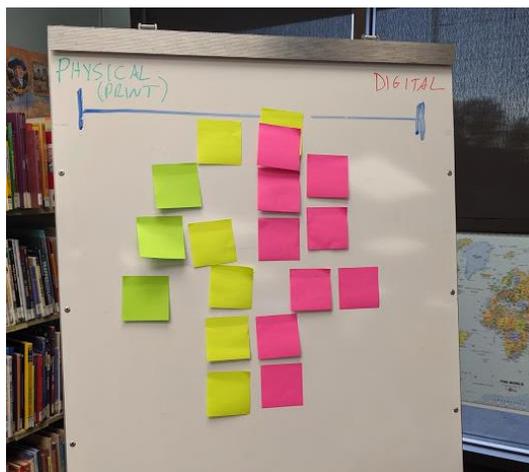
MCL also has some savings to address a new branch (approximately \$3 million), and the prospect of grants up to another \$1.2 million. In addition, the library is currently investigating additional development activities. After waiting many years, MCL is well-positioned for significant enhancements of the Clifton branch. This consultant recommends that the library should consider an expansion of 20,000 to 25,000 sf, depending upon fundraising and committed partnerships.

Public input

Four continua of service

Public entities often seek input on direction. The challenge is finding a way to solicit *informed* opinions. Rather than distributing a broad, “what would you like to see at the library?” survey, I presented on four occasions a four-continuum model of current changes in library services, drawn from “Confronting the Future: Strategic Visions for the 21st-Century Public Library,” Policy Brief No. 4, June 2011, by Roger E. Levien. This model was presented to and discussed by library staff on September 9, 2019. It was presented to the public, at open meetings held at the current Clifton branch, on the evening of Oct. 24, 2019, the afternoon of Oct. 25, the morning of Oct. 26, 2019 en Espanol, thanks to the expert facilitation and translation skills of Eusebia Garza, MCL Literacy Program Specialist. (Note that the Spanish forum was abbreviated, skipping the third and fourth continua.) Immediately following that was the final meeting in English.

Today’s libraries fall across a range of choices on a continuum. Few libraries exist on one end or the other. But generally, the left side of the continuum represents a more traditional model; the right side represents the newer and transformative idea in modern librarianship. Attendees were asked to indicate (using differently colored sticky notes) where they thought their library fell on each continuum today, and where they thought the community would like their services to be in 3-5 years. This method delivers a very visual view of community consensus. (See attachment “Debriefs from Public Sessions.”)



The **first continuum or axis (see attachment)** presents the range from *physical* to *digital*. A physical library is primarily focused on materials: books, magazines, newspapers, DVD’s, CD’s, the tangible items used within the library or circulated to patrons. A digital library makes its resources available online, either within the library or remotely. In terms of the use of space, the former is characterized by many stacks; the latter by more computer workstations and other technologies (high speed wifi, demonstration devices like 3D printers, large screen monitors in study rooms, etc.). Many libraries have already stopped circulating physical movies and music, moving instead to digital offerings, and it’s likely that MCL will follow suit eventually.

The **second continuum** runs from *individual* service (one-on-one transactions between staff and patrons) to *community* (uses by groups). In the first case, there

are service desks and personal study tables. In the second, there are more community gathering spaces, typically discrete rooms with tables and chairs, video display and sound equipment.

The **third continuum** runs from *collection* to *creation*. The collection is again characterized by stacks or services presenting content that is consumed (read, viewed, or listened to) by the public. Creation is about the production, either individually or in groups, of new content. MCL has a history here: its maker stations, public programs, and services to scan artwork all fall on the more modern side of the continuum, and were familiar to, and admired by, many of the attendees at all meetings. (This is one of the two continua not discussed with the Hispanic audience.) There were also requests for space dedicated to music, particularly for rehearsals. The combined space need is relatively modest for Clifton, probably requiring only typical meeting rooms of various sizes, although a music room might require additional sound proofing

The **fourth continuum** is *portal to archive*. A portal library is about the often transient materials that bring the world to the community (i.e. news, popular and current books, music, and movies). Whether physical or digital, this content is about what's going on in the larger culture. An archival library is about taking the community to the world; it gathers and organizes unique local stories, in large part because Amazon and Google will not. Archival libraries step a little ways into museum territory, with collections of letters, maps, and photographs, although many of these sources may also be digitized. (This was the second continuum not discussed with the Hispanic audience.) There was some, but not overwhelming support for this idea. A smaller collection of historic materials, supported by a digital archive, might be a reasonable beginning of a local history collection.

The groups also experienced two other exercises: what do you want to **preserve** from the existing library, and what are your **aspirations** for the new branch that we haven't touched on yet? Again, the responses are displayed in the attachment.

While the total number of attendees was not of statistical significance, there was nonetheless a consistent consensus.

- MCL patrons are generally happy with current Clifton services (collection, programs, and most particularly the *staff*, who were universally hailed as approachable, competent, and worthy of a raise). Library patrons believe the library in downtown Grand Junction presents a solid model for future-oriented services. Moreover, almost all public attendees were willing to take a cautious step in the direction of the newer trends. Interestingly, the Hispanic public meeting was the most cautious about the adoption of new directions, but also made the strongest case for accessible community services beyond just libraries, offered with partnerships. Parenting classes

are one example. They also raised a different model of family library services, where the whole family “shops” together, rather than breaking into separate areas by age.

- More specifically, the most urgent need for the new branch is community space. According to staff, the circulating collection and computer workstations are well-used, but not overwhelmed. MCL has figured out the community need for content, and how to meet it. But there simply isn't enough shared space for groups small and large. There was clear interest both in more library programming for all ages, but also community-supplied programming and services such as medical and legal assistance, and even daycare. This might be addressed through partnerships with other agencies.
- There was particularly strong interest in the library as a demonstration of “green” or sustainable architecture. People wanted natural light, exposure to nearby mountain views, solar panels (including over parking), low water-use landscaping, and strong integration with public transportation (particularly a bus pull-off from the main road to the library's south).
- All groups spoke up on behalf of early childhood literacy (storytimes and collections in English and Spanish, English as a Second Language tutoring). Most groups wanted to see an expansion of teen space. Storytime and teen space would be considered “special use” spaces in the chart presented in Recommendations, below.
- There was also a keen interest in outside spaces. In addition to a preference for a covered porch and outdoor seating, many attendees wanted to see some kind of outdoor programming: small concerts, a children's playground, or a community garden.
- Parking is a modest problem at the current location. Many attendees expressed an interest in better lighting, clearer flow of traffic, accessible parking for the disabled, and greater safety overall.
- There was a recurrent interest in visual art, whether as internal galleries or outside sculpture gardens.

In general, however, Clifton area residents seem very much in synch with current library planning and service profiles. They want a library that is rooted in traditional services, but takes a step toward more of a community orientation, technology support, and embrace of its history and environment. The unique element of the Clifton location is what is outside the building, the land itself. But there is also a keen interest in the library as a statement of community values, an embrace of the worth and dignity of residents of Clifton and Fruitvale.

Recommendations

Space allocation and estimated costs

After reviewing existing use patterns according to staff, and expressed interest by the public, this consultant would recommend key branch internal space allocations as follows:

Category	% of total	10,000 sf	15,000 sf	20,000 sf	25,000 sf
Collection (including public tech)	24%	2,400	3,600	4,800	6,000
Meeting	20%	2,000	3,000	4,000	5,000
User seating	14%	1,400	2,100	2,800	3,500
Special use	14%	1,400	2,100	2,800	3,500
Staff space	8%	800	1,200	1,600	2,000
Non-assigned (including mechanical)	20%	2,000	3,000	4,000	5,000
Projected cost @ \$325/sf		\$3,250,000	\$4,875,000	\$6,500,000	\$8,125,000

In most of these scenarios, the **collection** takes up the largest percentage of space, a continuing and demonstrable desire of library users. This consultant strongly recommends continuing the approximate parity of space given to children's and adult collections. The focus on early childhood literacy and family literacy will be underscored by prominence and pride of place. Increased storytimes can have a big payoff in library use and influence. The greatest single expansion of use is for **meeting rooms**; there should be at least four differently sized spaces, to include one large space (seating at least 50-80 in a theater setting, and divisible into two spaces), and at least two spaces (for groups 8-12). If there is a decision needed between them, more smaller rooms are better. Interest was expressed in meeting rooms that could be used when the library was closed. **User seating** includes open public seating, such as tables, chairs, and study carrels. **Special use** falls into additional small study spaces, and the possibility of partner spaces (business incubator, or leased space for legal services, counseling, or daycare, for instance). It might also encompass maker spaces, or a small local history area. **Staff space**

includes both public space (the “hub” model of a single central service desk works well for the staff, rather than multiple smaller desks, and should be preserved if possible), and more private shared office and break space. **Non-assigned space** is simply the openness required to make use of library real estate: walkways, space around tables, and so on, as well as necessary mechanical room space (typically a combination of the previous spaces, divided by 4). Space recommendations are expressed as percentages, to allow for easier recalculation based on the building footprint.

Note that construction costs are an estimate. FCI, a Grand Junction based government construction company, says it’s hard to build anything in the area for under \$300/sf, and some architects suggest \$350/sf as a better measure. Above, the figure \$325/sf for construction splits the difference. Note, too, that Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment (FFE) is estimated at another \$30/sf, although with staging, it may not be necessary to include that cost from the start. In general, a 10,000 sf library preserves existing services and adds community, staff, and special use spaces. But the community hopes for an expansion of existing services, too. A 20,000 sf library provides sufficient space to double existing services *and* provide additional services. In general: 10,000 sf is immediately doable; 20,000 sf is forward looking and the recommended target; 25,000 sf is the best bet for the future. 10,000 sf and 15,000 sf are provided for comparisons, and to make adjustments based on actual fundraising.

Other key design features

The land acquired for the new branch is narrow and deep, and one day soon might be halved by a potential road extension. This suggests a “campus” plan with group functions to the north or south of the acreage. For instance, library and parking might be on one side, meeting rooms and an outside auditorium on the other. Which cluster of buildings is closest to the road depends upon fundraising and partners; the library might have the stronger street presence, although its orientation should be toward the mountains, not the road.

This consultant recommends a single floor for the library (although a rooftop seating space, with shade, should be considered). Generally speaking, one floor is less expensive to build and maintain, and tends to be both more accessible and efficient. No additional space is necessary for otherwise required stairways or elevators. Designing a building that can be expanded upward is also more expensive. A 25,000 sf building on one level is very navigable and supervisable even by a modest staff. (On the other hand, a space that is 5 times larger than the current facility will almost certainly require *some* additional staff. Adding additional hours, which would seem desirable to the community after such an expansion, will also require additional staff.)

While it may not be necessary to pursue official LEED certification, the environment of Mesa County, and the interest of the public, strongly leans toward a true green building: turned to the natural light but managing it with appropriate windows, and window and porch coverings; harnessing solar energy in the parking lot and/or roof; possible use of geo-thermal energy; and clad in surfaces that reduce heat islands. Mountain views should be acknowledged and invited into the library.

Parking should be roughly the same square footage as the library itself. Again, please note the community interest in covered, solar-panel parking, as well as parking for motorcycles and scooters. As noted in the public comments, there is strong interest in making the library transit friendly. The bus should be able to pull off the main road, and load and unload passengers safely. The large lot means there should be adequate space for a drive through lane, at least for returns, and possibly for pickups.

Given the additional land, the community would also respond well to outside features such as a community garden, a children's park, or distinct structures leased to or operated by community partners (legal or mental health counseling, daycare, etc.). These spaces might actually be closer to the F road, with the library farther north. However, outside features should probably not be considered part of the basic library budget; they are excellent candidates for additional fundraising.

Other planning considerations

Library space planning is moving away from hard numbers (specific volumes per capita, square feet per capita, etc.) and toward a more strategic focus. Population growth in the proposed service area is relatively slow and steady (.12% population growth year to year). But additional and sudden growth is possible. At 10,000 sf, the library would give good value to its community today--but the library should be aware that expectations rise with new construction, often precipitating in itself the need for more staff and hours.

Overbuilding the space--constructing unfinished "shell" space adjacent to meeting rooms--would permit the library to lease that space to community partners, with or without financial incentives. At some future time, the land might permit the sale and construction of permanent space for those partners, freeing up existing space for libraries. This is a cheap way to "bank" space for future expansion, and save for new Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipment.

Typically, it takes about a year to design, and another year to build, a branch. (See Timeline below.)

Ongoing Operational Costs

The key cost of libraries is not construction; it is operations.

Today, a bird's-eye view of Clifton costs is as follows:

Rent	5936.33
Electricity	580
Water	47.99
Broadband	109.99
Pest Control	56.76
Supplies	125
Staff	16242.12
Total Per Month	23098.19
Divided by 5,400sf	\$4.28

This is a handy way to begin to estimate ongoing operational costs: multiply the total square footage by the square foot costs, then factor in Consumer Price Index increases, and changes such as more staff, or less need for power (due to solar panels). Of course, the library would no longer be paying rent.

Timeline

This preliminary schedule is based on conversations between the Director and the Department of Local Affairs at the State.

January 2020:

- Begin work with University of Colorado Denver (UCD) students

Summer 2020:

- Community Feedback on conceptual renderings

Fall 2020:

- Begin capital campaign

December 2020:

- UCD students complete conceptual work
- Hire Owners Rep
- Continue with capital campaign

January/February 2021:

- Continue with capital campaign
- Bid + Hire Architect
- Bid + Hire contractor

August 2021:

- Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) construction grant submission

Fall 2021:

- Architect completes work w/contractor

November 2021:

- Presentation to DOLA

February 2022:

- DOLA Award w/contract

March 2022:

- Groundbreaking

There is strong interest and excitement about the project in Clifton and Fruitvale. It is entirely possible that partners and funds will fall into place. But this suggests that the project should be phased, with calendar triggers to decide whether particular construction phases should proceed, or be shelved for later.

Conclusion

MCL has done a good job in establishing modern library services, in earning community trust, in saving money to jumpstart the project, and in seeking community input about the new branch. It seems well positioned to now build on that excitement to generate important and perhaps transformative investment in a new library model for outreach.

This consultant anticipates a successful new library, and a grateful community.

James LaRue, CEO

LaRue & Associates

November 2019