



**22 Bedford Road
Carlisle, Massachusetts 01741**

Facility Review and Recommendations January 2021

Introduction

The Gleason Public Library in Carlisle, MA is an attractive public library serving a population just over 5,000 residents. Carlisle is located some 22 miles northwest of Boston. The library was renovated, with an addition, in 2000. The 11,500 square foot building is in very good condition and is visually appealing. In November of 2020, the Library retained the services of Ruth E. Kowal, Library Consultant, to review the current layout and use of the building, and to propose potential solutions to address identified operational and public service concerns and inefficiencies resulting from the current layout of the building. On November 12, 2020 Ruth Kowal met with Library Director Martha Feeney-Patten to review items identified as current concerns with the facility, to learn about possible improvements identified by the director and library staff, and to do a visual inspection of the library for additional issues and to identify possible solutions. Following the visual inspection of the building and identification of recommendations for addressing various facility service delivery issues, the consultant reviewed the Library's *2021-2025 Strategic Plan* for identified community priorities and goals set for the library for the next five years. Many of the consultant's recommendations support community priorities articulated in the Strategic Plan.

Consultant's Initial Observations

The building is easily accessible, with entrances on opposite sides of the building, directly adjacent to parking that wraps around 3 sides of the building. One entrance, adjacent to designated handicapped parking spaces, is equipped with an automated handicapped accessible door. The entrances bring people into a wide hallway that runs across the 1st floor of the building, from one entrance to the other entrance.

The entrance closest to the Circulation desk is the de facto "main entrance" due to the higher number of parking spaces on that side of the building. That entrance currently does not have an automated handicapped accessible door. The Reference desk is located at the other entrance, the entrance that is used most heavily by students after school as it is in a direct line from the school. Staff cannot easily see from one desk to the other. While the two-entrance arrangement is convenient for visitors, the positioning of the entrances on opposite sides of the building creates potential issues with the supervision and security of the building. Staff are not readily visible to library visitors, nor is visibility good for the staff in terms of seeing who is entering the building. Even though the 2 public services desks and the 2 entrances are quite close to each other, the lack of good visibility requires a staff presence at both entrances, an inefficient use of staff for a relatively small building.

The director's office is located just off the main hallway near the lesser used entrance. The office is very small, with limited space for larger project work or to meet with more than 2 people at a time. In addition, it is in a very public location that results in a noisy workspace for the director. Activities requiring concentration, and at times privacy, including financial, budgetary, personnel, and grant writing activities, are at risk of regular interruption. Adding to the lack of an accessible, yet quiet and private workspace for the director, the office has 2 doorways, the one to the main hallway and one to the staff work area. This has resulted in a "pass through" with staff taking advantage of the convenience of the shortest path to public service areas by regularly passing through the director's office.

The Library's furnishings and fixtures date generally from the 2000 renovation and are attractive, but inflexible, wooden desks and shelving units. The circulation and reference desks are in essence fixed in place; the 4-person carrel unit on the 2nd floor is a bulky piece of furniture that cannot be subdivided or easily reduced in size; the counter used for the public access computers is attached to a wall and located in the middle of public area, with no sound buffering; and much of the shelving is for all intents fixed in place. If there is carpet underneath the shelving it will be compressed and probably discolored. I anticipate moving any of the shelving to improve sightlines or to remove sections of shelving will require outside expertise, both for the moving of the shelving and for the treatment of the remaining carpet or flooring that has been beneath the shelving units.

In the middle of the building, off the main hallway, is a spiral stairway leading to the 2nd floor. The stairway is architecturally attractive, but space consuming. In addition to the stairway being "bulky", the location of the stairway blocks visibility from the circulation desk into the public reading room area, as well as making it impossible for the staff at the reference desk to see who is entering the building at the circulation desk side and who is going up and down the stairway.

The 2000 addition section of the 2nd floor houses the non-fiction collection, study carrels and tables, a teen area, and leisure seating. The renovated portion of the original building's 2nd floor houses the children's collection. A small, glass-walled conference room has been installed between the new and the old building. This room permits small groups, tutoring, and when not in use by appointment, individual use. The conference room is attractive, although it is reported to suffer from a lack of airflow. The children's area is attractive but has little open area for free play. The "Mural room" off the main children's room is visually appealing but needs a new and defined purpose (it currently houses 2 little-used computers). A small staff desk is located at the top of the spiral stairway, between the children's area and the adult/teen collection and study spaces.

The 3rd floor of the building, renovated space in the original building, houses the public meeting room. Access is via the public elevator or a lengthy stairway original

to the old building. There is a second narrow stairway directly out of the meeting room space which serves as an emergency egress. Built-in wooden cabinets and shelving housing the local history collection line two sides of the meeting room. The room overall feels a bit dark and compressed.

There are closets and mechanical spaces scattered throughout the building resulting in a lack of control over what gets stored where.

Staff Identified Concerns and Needs

Need a more welcoming entrance-staff are “barricaded” behind the circulation desk

Staff are hidden by the service desks

Sightlines into public areas are poor

Need a book return slot in the circulation desk

The teen area needs to be “contained” in some way to manage sound

Teens need a teen “friendly” space

The “mural” room in the Children’s area is underutilized

The computers in the “mural” room are underutilized

The lack of flexibility translates to inefficient service delivery

At least one contained single-person study room is desirable, more if possible

Space to make telephone calls is needed

Space where food can be consumed is needed

Noise mitigation is a high priority. Noise travels up and down the spiral stairway

Shelving blocks visibility and is not easily moveable

Public computers are right in the middle of a busy public area with no privacy and contribute to the noisiness of the 1st floor

The staff breakroom is not separated from the staff workroom

There is no centralized storage

There are no places to hang coats, book bags, etc.

There is no area to park strollers

Consultant's Recommended Actions for Consideration-Lower Cost

Reduce the floor space required for periodicals by reducing/eliminating back-issue retention. Staff need to review the use of back issues and determine what constitutes “reasonable” retention. The retention period may vary from periodical to periodical, depending on availability of titles online, and local use and demand for back issue hard copy access. New shelving/display units with a smaller footprint and lower profile can be purchased to replace the old units. If there is original carpet underneath the current periodical shelving, the change in shelving will require removal of the old carpet and the installation of replacement floor treatment. There is the possibility the old shelving can be sold. With online access, back issues are readily available for use at the library and at home, eliminating the need to store them. The new shelving should be on casters, with a flat surface on top that can be used to display items in the collection.

Replace a portion of the public desktop computers with laptops and/or tablets that can be checked out to patrons for in-library (or potentially for at-home) use. At least one desktop computer should be retained for public use, preferably near the Reference service desk. Staff will want to evaluate the use of the current desktop computers to determine how many should be retained and how many replaced initially with the more portable laptop/tablet units. Switching to laptops or tablet devices would permit distribution of computer use throughout the building and open up the current computer space for another purpose (for example, displaying new titles closer to the circulation and reference desks). The laptops/tablets would be stored in a single cabinet which can be located conveniently for staff access and control or made available for direct patron access if desired. An example of a charging storage cart can be found at: <https://www.demco.com/datum-laptop-charging-carts>

Remove the children's computers in the Mural Room and consider taking advantage of the whimsically decorated room as an intimate cubby for creative play or parent/caregiver read-to-children space. Access to computers in the Children's

Room can be provided by using tablets from a small storage unit in the Children's Room or from the centralized storage unit.

Replace some shelving in the children's room with colorful, child-sized shelving and/or bins for picture books. This shelving should be on heavy-duty, locking casters for ease of relocation as needs change. Casters are the library's new friend—they are being used under shelving, service desks, tables, and even chairs. Flexibility is key. Examples can be seen at BCI, a vendor specializing in library furnishings.

https://bcilibraries.com/portfolio_page/box-browser-childrens-furniture/

Consider adding a staff workstation in the Children's Room to locate a staff member closer to library users who may be seeking assistance in use of the collection and services, as well as to provide oversight of the room. This workstation should also be mobile to permit ease of relocation as needs change.

Consider making the entrance closest to the Reference desk “emergency egress only” to improve staff sightlines and safety for staff and for those entering and exiting the building. This would require adding an automated handicapped door mechanism to the entrance closest to the Circulation desk and relocating the designated handicapped parking spaces to the opposite side of the building.

Replace the current Circulation desk with flexible and user-friendly furniture. The existing circulation desk is an inflexible barricade between staff and library users. It is a classic old-style circulation desk, beautifully designed, but inefficient for current library staff and public use. There are many options for service desks that are designed to be compatible with the general appearance of the building, yet are flexible, reconfigurable as needs change, adjustable in height as needed, and easy to expand and shrink. Examples of flexible furniture can be seen at:

<https://bcilibraries.com/products/information-desks-systems/>

Consider shifting reference staff to the circulation desk for a shared service desk. This would be more efficient in terms of staff use, as well as facilitating backup and added safety by having staff together near a single entrance. This

becomes quite feasible if the lesser used entrance becomes an “emergency egress only” to consolidate entering and exiting the building to the single entryway facing the main parking area. Replacing the existing Circulation desk would be highly desirable if this change were to be made.

Replace the 4-person carrel with individual worktables located throughout the library.

Reduce the number of 4-person tables and replace with individual worktables.

Tables that are on casters can easily be moved together to create a larger work surface should the need arise. As much as possible, new worktables should come with wiring connectivity to connect directly into a power source.

Engage the services of a sound engineer to recommend ways to mitigate the sound across and between the 1st and 2nd floors. Sound is traveling across the two public service floors and between the 1st and 2nd floor of the addition. The noise from the Children’s Room is well contained within the area of the original building and does not seem to be affected by nor a contributor to the noise experienced in the addition. Of particular note is the level of noise generated by teen users of the library. Consideration should be given to creating a welcoming and comfortable space for teens, perhaps a glass-walled area similar to the small conference room on the 2nd floor, where teen users can study, talk, sit in teen-friendly furniture, use computers, listen to music, watch movies, and generally enjoy each other’s company.

The broader issue with noise migration comes from the central stairway between the 1st and 2nd floors. Solutions could include the installation of sound baffling in the spiral stair to absorb sound; wall covering in the stairway; or an aesthetically pleasing sound buffer hanging from the ceiling. There are some very artistic sound barriers available. Examples can be seen at:

<https://www.idfdesign.com/collection/5548/caimi-brevetti-spa/snowsound.htm>;
https://www.archiproducts.com/en/products/green-furniture-concept/hanging-acoustic-panel-pendant-lamp-leaf-lamp-series-pendant-lamp_66299.

An alternative approach would be to investigate the feasibility of installing glass doors at the base of the stairway. Doors that slide automatically would fit more easily and eliminate the issue of doors opening into the main corridor across the building. Building code issues regarding the size and location of a landing and fire egress requirements will determine whether this could be possible.

The 1st phase of the sound mitigation requires the services of a sound engineer who will be able to monitor noise levels and the flow of sound in the building and will then prepare a plan for remediation. If deemed desirable, the 2nd phase of this project would be the design, acquisition and installation of the appropriate sound buffering systems and materials.

Consultant's Recommended Actions for Consideration-Larger and Potentially More Costly Projects

Explore the removal and relocation of the central spiral stair unit. It is my understanding that a recent architectural review recommended the removal of the stairway. I am in full agreement with that proposal. The removal and relocation will not be a simple project; however, the resulting benefits are significant.

The stairway is consuming an excessive amount of valuable real estate and is literally located right in the middle of all public activities and use on both the 1st and 2nd floors. The massive stairway blocks visibility and impedes traffic flow. Envision what the 1st floor would look like and how it would function without that stairway in the middle. So many of the library's service delivery and staffing inefficiencies would be resolved by the relocation of the main stairway between the 1st and the 2nd floors. For example, if the new stairway were located opposite the elevator, beneath the stairs going from the 2nd to the third floors, the circulation desk would be displaced. However, with the removal of the spiral staircase, a new centralized service desk could be relocated to where the stairway had been, resulting in a single service desk with improved sight lines for the entire 1st floor, as well as the two entrances/exits. Additional floor space would be gained as well, which could be used for other needs such as small study rooms or a food-friendly area. Clearly, architectural and engineering expertise would be required to explore this option, but the end result could well be worth the cost.

Swap the 1st staff work room and the 3rd public meeting room. Relocating the public meeting room to the 1st floor would eliminate the potential for a congested evacuation of many people from the 3rd floor meeting room in an emergency. The lack of public restrooms directly adjacent to the current meeting room is also problematic, and certainly inconvenient. Relocating the public meeting room to the 1st floor would resolve the restroom adjacency issue, as well as making the meeting room convenient and readily accessible for all. There would be no need for the use of the public elevator. Emergency egress would be directly out the 1st floor

doorways to the parking lot. Public restrooms would be adjacent to the meeting room space.

A portion of the current 1st floor staff work room would be converted to the public meeting room. In addition, a small staff break room could be created adjacent to the new meeting room space, with a kitchen that could be shared by staff and the meeting room.

Potential barriers to this change in use include determining if the old chimney currently serves as weight bearing support for the upper floors and if the walls around the elevator mechanical room and janitor's closet are also load bearing. A meeting room with support columns is certainly feasible. However, exploring the support of the upper levels would be a critical part of the architectural and engineering review. Similar to the stairway relocation, this is a project requiring complex architectural and engineering services; however, traffic flow and safety benefits make it worth considering.

Relocating the staff workroom to the 3rd floor removes those activities to a “lesser used” portion of the building and opens up opportunities for consolidating storage into a staff work area. The built-in shelving and storage units could be repurposed for staff purposes. The 3rd floor meeting room is large enough to consider both the staff workroom and the **creation of a small meeting room/Trustees Room as a sub-division of the 3rd floor**. That room would be designated as the Trustees' Room, could be available for use for small public and staff meetings, and also provide a secure home for the local history collection. The local history collection should be evaluated with an eye towards the retention of items unique to Carlisle, and the withdrawal of items that are easily found elsewhere.

The director's office needs to be relocated and expanded. One option would be to install an office, similar to the glass-walled conference on the 2nd floor, where the Reference Desk is currently located. Another option, should the public meeting room and the staff work area be swapped and a small meeting room is added on the

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3rd floor, is to convert the small glass-walled meeting room on the 2nd floor into the Director's Office. Work would need to be done to improve the airflow for extended occupancy (that should probably be done now for the comfort of people using the room). In addition, privacy blinds would need to be installed.

Summary

There are a number of smaller projects that can be undertaken to make modest improvements to the building flow and staff efficiencies. Some of these are operational (staff sharing a single service desk); some are service delivery decisions requiring new equipment (tablets and a charging storage cabinet) and furnishing (single occupancy worktables); some are procedural (making one of the entryways an emergency exit only). Included in the smaller projects is the sound buffering. Reducing the amount of noise traveling between floors would be a good step forward while the relocation of the main stairway is under consideration.

The recommendation that would offer the most benefit, including related realignment of space and traffic flow, would be the removal of the spiral staircase and the installation of a new stairway to the 2nd floor. This project would initially require architectural and structural engineering services to determine feasibility and to determine the estimated cost. If this change in layout was deemed to be feasible and desirable, the next phase would require construction funding and implementation, with the knowledge and understanding that it carries with it the potential for the disruption of public service while construction is being done. With the development of a solid phasing plan for the project minimal public disruption should be achievable.

As noted earlier, the library is in very good condition and it is easy to forget it was renovated 20 years ago. The ways in which libraries are used have evolved considerably since 2000, as indicated in the User Needs section of the Library's *2021-2025 Strategic Plan*. It would be timely and appropriate for the Library and the Town of Carlisle to undertake another significant renovation to meet current and projected future needs of the community. When the time comes for another major renovation, I would urge those involved to consider a variety of facility utilization layouts and to not be constrained by the current configuration. It is important to understand fully what works well with the current building and what barriers exist that interfere with the effective, efficient, and the safe delivery of library services. It will be desirable to explore all possible creative solutions, through the repurposing

of space and service functions, to make it possible for the Gleason Public Library to meet the goals identified in the *2021-2025 Strategic Plan* and beyond.

Determining what works best for the delivery of public services and staff effectiveness, and what is structurally feasible in a building the age of the original library is always a challenge. Addressing the smaller issues will help, but in the long term, there are larger issues that require a significant amount of the work to the building to achieve resolution. As with similar projects, there are lesser and greater opportunities to make improvements for lesser and greater cost.