

# **Downtown Library Facility Effectiveness Assessment**

## **Cedar Rapids Public Library**

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## Executive Summary

The purpose of the facility effectiveness evaluation is to identify needed improvements for effective customer service and efficient operation by staff at Cedar Rapid's Downtown Public Library. The issues and comments are organized by building and service systems. These descriptions and observations of existing conditions are based on notes prepared by the consultant and 22 library stakeholders, including the Trustees, representatives of the Foundation and Friends, and members of the library staff. The stakeholders had much to say about the facility and the effectiveness study passes their comments along edited only for form.

The unanimous consensus is that the Downtown Library is in urgent need of significant renewal. The location, size, and basic form of the library continues to be as successful as the day the library opened. However, it is the layout, fixtures, furnishings, finishes, and building systems that must be replaced, reorganized, and/or renewed to propel the facility into the next 20 years as an effective delivery device for quality library service to the residents of Cedar Rapids. Over the course of the building's first 20 years of operation there have been:

- quantum changes in information formats and delivery methods
- significant changes in customer expectations
- relentless wear that must be expected in a heavily used community asset
- changes in operational and service methods
- the completion of building system equipment life-cycles

The comments of Trustees, senior staff, and representatives of the Friends and Foundation encompass 20 pages of insights grouped in 14 different areas of concern. The depth and breadth of those comments and insights reflect a need to re-invent the Cedar Rapids Public Library's interior spaces. Here are some key concepts that highlight this larger body of issues.

- There is an overwhelming need to replace the existing aggregation of piecemeal changes by the development of a comprehensive set of solutions for the service and operational concerns identified in this evaluation.
- The layout of all public services must be reconsidered to reflect changes in collections, services, and customer use and staffing patterns. Customer seating locations and groupings, the organization of collection shelving, the relationship between public service desks and public computer stations, and the visibility of study and meeting rooms are examples of the layout concerns to be resolved. The public floor needs to be broken-down into more human spaces.
- All furnishings and finishes must be re-evaluated and, in many cases replaced, to enliven the public spaces, reflect trends in retail techniques, and make the library more welcoming.
- The children's department layout should change its emphasis from static shelving stacks to engaging seating and an active environment for children and their caregivers at center stage.
- The whole building entry sequence should be re-considered. The distance customers must traverse to encounter the library's collections and services, where the customer is brought into the public floor, and the nature of the spaces the customer encounters in the entry process should all be evaluated.

- The lighting plan and portions of the mechanical systems are in need of replacement. There is deep customer and library dissatisfaction with the public floor lighting. The buildings heat pumps are slated for replacement in the immediate future. That work should be coordinated with the next steps in this renewal planning.
- Demand for the library's successful computer instruction program exceeds the programs physical limits. Space for that activity should be more visible and more flexible to maximize its benefit to the community.
- The library does not feature its local history and genealogical collections and services in the way some other public libraries do. The community may benefit from a more consolidated, highlighted development of those services.
- Staff work spaces should be evaluated for effective workflow, security, logical grouping of tasks, and capacity.

The scope of need is so significant it is difficult to limit the list of key issues for an executive summary. This bulleted list must be understood as only a preview of the more comprehensive comments of the library's planning team in the following pages. In the reading of those comments it is hard to miss the frequent repetition of issues. That repetition has been intentionally left in so that readers can sense for themselves the strength and unanimity of opinion on many issues.

As the library's planning moves forward the crafting of an ultimate plan will require the leadership and services of an architectural and interior design planning team.