

Alma Public Library

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<http://www.alma.lib.mi.us>

Marlies Manning

Summary of general information:

- Library was remodeled and expanded in 2007. Current size, 26,000 SF is close to what Big Rapids needs.

Building expansion experience:

- Architect and owner discovered, during the design process, that their proximity to the river required expensive permitting, river flood modeling, and huge delays in starting construction.
- D.E.Q. permitting delayed project 6 months, FEMA permitting delays delayed project an additional year.
- Had to cut back on design due to expensive of studies, remediation, and permitting.
- Building project financed with 2 mil bond, 20 yr. Bond.
- Architect told the library they would not have to move out during building. Later, the library was given one week notice that they had to move out.
- \$500,000 spent on architectural fees and permitting. Huge cuts had to be made in design, and furniture budget.
- Dennis Jensen, Design Works A/E was architect.
- Library expansion project had great support from the community and city staff.
- Used Breton Group for library consultant and for private capital campaign. Work was acceptable, but didn't listen to city on how to conduct the capital campaign.

Great features:

- Lots of natural light from all directions
- Nice outdoor space with view of the river. Nice view from soft seating areas.
- A lot of soft seating areas near windows.
- Dedicated local history room.
- Cafe area with (future) bistro tables and chairs located near entry and opposite circulation desk.
- Huge fireplace.
- Designed to allow for expansion
- Old community center will be razed for expansion of the parking lot.
- Preschool story time done in a meeting room (noise control).
- Meeting room has a divider wall. But have to make sure that reservations indicate whether they want the side with kitchen facility.
- Circular drive with book drops (3).
- Time capsule behind the corner stone.

Recommendations:

- Put everything on casters to make it easy to move.
- Exposed metal ceiling is too loud. Use acoustic tiles.
- Painted black ceiling absorbs too much light.
- Put fire rated doors and sprinkler system in room for book drop off.
- Put restrooms in line of sight of circulation desk. They have to install security cameras in the foyer to monitor restrooms. Circulation desk can't see who is entering building.
- Used Library Design Associates for interior design of library.
- Hire a project manager/owners representative unless your DPW can handle the project.

Dale Hobart

This visit was more a lesson in beware and pay attentions than a lesson in this or that feature is desirable. Alma is a remodel and an addition project for a city library that is located downtown on a river.

That river plus other site restraints caused them to have an incomplete project. The contractors were on sight ready to start when they were notified that the project was impinging onto a flood plain. That meant several months and several thousands of dollars in delay in the project. This cost caused the need to make reductions in the project since the millage and bonding was already complete. The most obvious problem pointed up was the lack of furnishings and the incomplete feeling of some of the library.

Not only did the river flood plain issue cause budget problems but the attempt to marry an existing building to an addition created a space that felt disconnected. The existing building and physical location constraints made for an awkward building that look like it could cause problems for their small staff to support.

While the addition was open and had good lighting, I was not comfortable in this space. There was a large chimney/fireplace that overpowered the space and the circular walls put limitations on the use of shelving along the walls.

The staff was very helpful in talking about what they had achieved with the new facility and what they wished was different in the space. They were pleased that they now had space to grow their collection. Some community members had built some very nice props for the children's storytelling spaces.

Mary Ryan

These are my impressions of our visit to the Alma Public Library. It is a city library and the director was very proud of what they had to offer to both city residents and anyone else who wished to use the library by charging them a fee. They do charge \$1.00 to check out CDs and DVDs for both children and adults. They had to install safety bars to connect the taller stacks in the adult collection area; otherwise the inspector would not have approved them to open.

The process of planning and carrying out a library project from start to finish is a complicated one. It took 3 months for the initial drawings, 18 months to complete the plans and 2 years to finish the building. Bringing consultants, architects and contractors together requires time and patience to avoid costly mistakes. There were many that were pointed out to us: \$230,000 remediation of the land to build the addition on the flood plain; \$50,000 relocation services because they couldn't stay in their existing building while the addition was being worked on; these additional costs greatly diminished their furnishing budget.

I don't know how Director Bryan Dinwoody lived to tell us all that they had been through in the four years that it took to complete the project. They are still working through issues. They did not hire a construction manager trying to save money. In his summary, what would Director Dinwoody do differently? 1) More questioning of the consultant on the process of fundraising and overall management of a capital campaign (you need to set parameters that you expect them to work in and he was not that impressed with the Breton Group); 2) Would have been more insistent on relocating away from the river (How could the architect be so off not understanding the flood plane?) ; and 3) A more questioning attitude toward the architectural firm; the relationship of "us as a client" seemed to get lost in the process.

Bryan's advice to us: "Take time to plan carefully and avoid costly mistakes".

Gaylynn Rorabaugh:

Our visit to the Alma Public Library was very interesting. They used their original structure built in 1963 for the following reasons:

- Building was sound
- Single floor makes the building easier to staff and manage
- Part of the municipal complex
- Had a value of approximate \$500,00.00
- Community felt strongly about recycling buildings (although an old school building was to be renovated into the new middle school and the project went very badly.)

The building is 26,000 sq. feet and the layout on the lot makes it a long, narrow space with BR 127 on the south and the river on the west. The entrance is currently awkward to see, but that will improve with the razing of an old adjacent building and a re-design of the parking lot.

Features include:

- Lots of windows making the new space feel very light and airy
- Small seating areas in window nooks overlooking the river
- Large fireplace
- Local history room
- Will have coffee bar across from circulation desk in future.
- Rotunda with Teen space

Challenges:

- Ceramic tile by Circulation desk is loud when moving shelving trucks across to the stacks
- Circulation desk offset from entrance so visibility is reduced to restrooms and meeting rooms also, cannot see when someone enters the building.
- Cameras (6) needed to be installed to monitor the lobby area and other areas of the building
- Ceiling in original portion are metal and painted black
- Meeting room can be separated into two rooms but kitchen is one side and tables/chairs storage on other side

Funding:

Alma is a City library with funding very similar to ours. Allocation from the City and Penal Fines represent the bulk of their funding. They are also beginning to struggle financially and the Director indicated that within the next few years, this must be addressed. With a library that has just greatly increased in size, operating costs alone have increased dramatically. That amount has yet to be completely determined as they only moved back into the library in June of 2007.

Consultants/Architects:

One of the areas discussed that I greatly appreciated their frankness was in their experiences with both the consultants and their architect. They used the Breton group for their needs assessment and were very pleased with those results. However, when they used them for the capital campaign, they were less happy. The community did not respond well to the individual solicitation letters sent out. The amount requested in each was determined by a personal interview with a member of the Breton Group. Both the staff and the community were uncomfortable with this format. They felt if they were to do it again "more questioning of the consultant on the process of fundraising and management of a capital campaign" would be needed.

The architect was Dennis Jensen of Design Works A/E. While he indicated experience with rivers and flood plains, the permitting process took much more time and dollars. Also, he indicated that the Library could remain open during the process but a week prior to starting construction; the contractor said they had to move out of the space. Additional costs and a great deal of rushing around occurred in order to meet that time frame. They were out of the Library for two years.

In addition, there were questions unanswered and changes that just did not happen. That left the staff with some awkward situations to try to deal with. Ultimately, these cost increases meant that areas of plan had to be reduced and redesigned. If they had to do it again, the Director and Staff indicated that they would have been "more insistent on relocating away from the river."

Library Design Associates were hired to help with the furnishings and layout. With the construction issues, funds for interior work and furnishings were dramatically reduced. Some shelving was re-purposed and still needs to be finished. There are a few chairs by the fireplace but not what was intended originally.

The staff was very forthcoming about the challenges they faced throughout the process. We spent about 2.5 hours with them and learned a great deal.