

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What do you believe the Big Rapids community expects from the Library?

- People expect typical public library services including popular materials, assistance with student research, services to children.
- Summer programs for children first and foremost, to bring out their love of reading; it is for access to books they seek such as bestsellers or topics of interest. Most important role is for people who cannot afford to buy magazines and books. Access to the internet.
- Service and ability to get research information, genealogy, children's programs.
- Library has been there a long time and serves as a traditional public library.
- Services for children, general reading materials, videos.
- A place for kids especially; a lot of people in Big Rapids will feel the same way.
- This has changed over the last decade because of the internet; people are looking for periodicals, hard cover books, videos, tapes and to get assistance from the staff.
- Older people use it mainly for recreational reading and for use of the computers.
- Summer reading program; a community resource for children; an important part of the community's infrastructure just as are a good hospital, public safety, etc. – important to the quality of life.
- They expect it to be there and to have what they want when they walk in the door; to have a trained and professional staff to assist them.
- A place for internet access; an educational place for children as they grow and for adults later in life. The role of the Library should not be to serve as the cultural center for the community. This is being done through Art Works [located at 106 N. Michigan]. The \$1 million grant from Lansing was based on Art Works being a cultural center for the community. The Library should cooperate and partner with this effort and not compete with it. The community needs to know that the Library and Art Works are working together. [Example: the Big Rapids Community Library is hosting the summer foreign film series and houses the video equipment provided by Art Works.]
- Opportunities for people of different ages and backgrounds to have access to written and recorded materials; a community center and meeting space.
- The community wants a Library that is easily accessible with a fair number of books and resources to use. Some people come in to use newspapers and magazines. A place people can walk to.

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- There is a significant split in thinking on what the community expects. There is the traditional group of people that would think of kids reading time or grabbing a novel for recreational reading. Others think of the Library as a place to go to sit and study, read magazines, and for many seniors to use high speed internet connections. Also, a gathering place and a place for meetings.
- A place for people to get books for pleasure reading, some research materials. A place that is easily accessible with a staff that is helpful.
- Continuation of existing service. Many people would like space for public meetings, improved internet access, and better accessibility.

Do you, yourself use the Library?

- I do not but my spouse uses it.
- No but I have a card and take my grandchildren to the Library.
- Infrequently – have a card.
- Yes, occasionally.
- Very seldom,
- No, my spouse does.
- Yes, at least every other month.
- Yes, take my child to the Library.
- Have not used it in many years – at least 15 to 18 years.
- My use is very limited but our family uses it. Important for our children.
- I use the internet almost all the time, am a voracious reader and buy most of my books. I used the Library with my children when they were growing up but do not use it now.
- Some.
- Yes, I am an active user.
- Yes.
- Yes, about three or four times a year.

If yes, what is the reason you most often visit the Library?

- To take grandchildren to Library.
- For books and tape and general reading materials.
- Attend book club monthly.
- For research; to take my son to get books and videos.
- Getting a book.
- Looking through current periodicals, *Consumer Reports* (saves me from subscribing).

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- For introducing my children to books and reading. I see the Library as an important place for people to go to think, read, research, do homework or a work project or just to relax in the presence of books.
- I am a frequent Library user – use books on tape; I take my grandchildren to the Library when they visit for books and programs.
- Taking children and getting them reading materials.
- Some but my spouse uses it more often.
- If I am going on a trip I use books and audio books for pleasure reading. I don't use it as much for reference because of the internet but realize there are many in the community who don't have internet access or high speed access. They come to the Library to get access to the internet.
- I read for recreation, especially books on tape and disc. I also call the library for information such as getting information on the CPI for a certain year and answers to other questions. Often the Library staff can pinpoint an answer for me much faster than my wandering around on the internet.
- I go in to browse and get something that grabs my attention. Also for income tax forms.
- Mostly to get books for pleasure reading.

Do you use other libraries? If so, why?

- I use Ferris State's library for computers. Staff is very helpful and has assisted with some legal research. It is great that Ferris is open and available to the community.
- My 14 year-old child uses Ferris for assistance with high school assignments.
- No, I do not.
- Ferris – allows the community to use the library and is a fantastic facility only three blocks away. Do we need to duplicate what is already in existence for us? This was tried with the football field and that did not fly - did not even get off the ground. The question will come up – “Do we need it?”
- The FLITE Library at Ferris is great but it is not a replacement for the public library.
- Ferris.
- Ferris for research; a lot of my work is done via the internet including things that I used to use the Library for.
- Ferris, very infrequently.
- Yes, I use Ferris and mainly for the law materials but much of that now is available online.
- I use the FLITE Library at Ferris infrequently.

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- I occasionally use Ferris.
- I use the FLITE Library but recognize that this is a different collection and has a different purpose than what the public library provides.
- I try the public library first and if the item or topic I need information on is not available, I use FLITE. I also use interloan service at the public library which is really a very good help to me for getting books from other libraries.
- Ferris from time to time. The idea that the Ferris library can provide help to younger children or even junior high level kids for their school assignments is not realistic. A public library is set up to do this. Many people, who do not understand the totally different services provided by a university library as opposed to a public library, do not understand their completely separate roles. The Ferris library is not set up to serve kids.
- Occasionally I will use FLITE at Ferris – maybe a couple of times a year.
- No, I do not.

When you enter the Library, what is your initial impression?

- It is crowded, cramped and unattractive. The restrooms are located in the basement and are a hassle to use.
- Old and very congested.
- Antiquated. For a community our size we should have a Library much more up to date.
- Old and needs remodeling and updating; crowded, claustrophobic.
- Very outdated.
- Difficult for teenagers to use; not an exciting place – crowded. The two floor setup makes it even harder to use. This is bad for the user and bad for the staff. Most libraries I have seen that I really like are on one floor. A lot easier for families to use when you can keep an eye on their children.
- Abysmal.
- I love the building and the setting; there could be some improvements made in the facility; Taggart family provided the facility many years ago and put money into it – probably in the 1960s. Basement used to be the “first floor” and there were classrooms down there.
- Certainly it is an older building without a “wow” factor. It is an older brick school building. It seems functional but dated. The staff is very helpful.
- The Library facility is a disgrace and a poor representation of our community. Although the restrooms themselves are nice (I think the staff and board should be commended for what they have done to

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- It is a very “doom and gloom” and dreary old sort of a place to go into. My children were actually afraid of the building and absolutely did not like going into the basement to use the restrooms. I am a historic buff and have taken an active interest in preserving historic buildings in Big Rapids; but the Library building is not worthy of the same status as are several other buildings in the community. The building might be a great place for the museum if changed out for that purpose. Preserving the building for some other purpose is fine, but it is a bad building for the Library.
- You have to go up steps; it is not very welcoming or accessible and the restrooms in the basement are locked.
- It is old and depressing.
- It is an old school. No matter what is done to it, it will still be an old school. It is an out of date school and does not work well as a library facility.
- Crappily laid out. This means not a welcoming entrance and a hodge-podge of rooms. The staff is great and does their best but the facility works against them. There is no “central area” on entry to allow you to understand the facility.
- It is a nice Library but convoluted and difficult in some ways to use. Not an open floor plan.

Is the current location of the Library the best location for the community?

- I love the location because it is so close to downtown. It would be nice to be able to expand the Library and put a parking lot in the back of the building.
- It is near downtown and convenient. Parking is a problem especially for the handicapped.
- A nice convenient location to downtown and centered in the community.
- Downtown location would be great; it would attract people downtown which is helpful to businesses there.
- The Library has been at the current location for a long time but I have no strong feelings one way or the other; most important to consider if the site will allow for parking, building additions in the future; but walking distance and close to downtown is good - a central location.
- Bringing it downtown would be positive but parking is more of an issue; frat house and rentals in current area make parking difficult as well. Most important – make sure the site and facility are being planned for

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

the long-term. If it costs more to renovate the current facility than to build new, I don't believe keeping the facility would be worth it.

- Yes, if it is left inside the City limits. But consideration could be given to placing it outside of town say at the high school where there is a lot of parking.
- Parking is needed at the site; I think the basement could be utilized and an addition put to add space to the building. Cameras in the facility would help with security and safety.
- The current site is not a terrible location. Some people would like to see it downtown across from City Hall and I would favor this. The Library would help to draw people downtown and be a good anchor for businesses and other downtown activities. On Fridays in the summer we have music downtown and a farmer's market and there is the river walk as well. The Library is not that far away from downtown but it is not viewed as being a "downtown" facility now, more a neighborhood location.
- The current location is great. I would favor taking the old building down if necessary to get a decent facility. Expanding the property further north and re-using the current facility would be fine and might get better support. Build a new building and find a re-use for the current one.
- I don't think the current location is the best one for the Library. I am a strong proponent for locating the Library downtown. It would be more visible there and be an attractor for getting more people downtown.
- It is a nice location in town but I am not sure if it is the best location or not. Location is most likely a matter of affordability.
- I do not know what other locations might be under consideration. I think the Library will be utilized no matter where it is. People drive to their destinations a lot of time. I don't think location is that critical.
- There is inadequate parking. It is on a busy street where people have to park with small children to get out of cars. It is not a good spot. Much of the housing in the near vicinity is student rentals.
- I have a built in bias for having things stacked together and would favor a downtown site for the synergy of having people go to one central area for a number of services. Some people like the current location as a "connector" between the university and downtown. I don't see this because I don't believe college use of the public library is that great. Also, this area has a lot of college rental property located nearby.
- If you did not know it was a library you might not be able to find it. It is a bit off the beaten path.

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Are there other locations that might be better?

- I do not think trying to crowd it in downtown in the business section is a good idea. I would be surprised if the people of Big Rapids would support a millage that would be used to tear down any existing properties. Property available across from City Hall is most likely not big enough and much of the parking is across the street.
- State and Maple location [Old Carriage Automotive] would be a good visible site.
- Possible downtown site may not provide enough space for the building; it is also on a small creek that has flooded and lapped over that lot. An ice cream store on the creek including pavement was washed out. The 100 year flood could prove devastating and who knows when that could come.
- This location has been the public library for many years; I have no strong feelings of attachment to the location; most important for me is it should be in the City and have enough room for parking and even to add on to the building in the future; should be centrally located and not on the edge of the City; walking distance is important.
- While going through Hesperia on Highway 20 at night went by a well-lit beacon of a building and thought “what is that?” I turned around and found out it was the Hesperia Library. Now if that community can afford a library like that, we should be able to do so. [Hart serves 6,166 residents; the library is 11,900 sq. ft.]
- Current location is a good one; walkable from the City; parking is a problem now. Other locations should be where the population flows such as on Perry Street or downtown. The site across from City Hall may be feasible but isn't it too small for a one-story building?
- What about the Fifth/Third bank? Has this been considered? Should be considered.
- I believe it would be difficult to leave the existing facility and land that was donated as a Library to the citizens of the community. There must be certain restrictions on just what could be done.
- A downtown location if big enough would also be okay. I am not married to the current location or facility. I think it is important to keep it in the City.
- Six blocks makes a lot of difference to people. Location is one issue to deal with but getting a support mechanism in place to fund improvements is the toughest nut to crack. There are some sentimental attachments to the building. Success in this project will require us to look at a bigger picture that includes the entire area. People have got to get beyond these things and say “What is best for my grandchild.”

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- I have no attachment to the existing building; other sites could certainly be considered but size of lots and costs would be critical factors.
- I am not convinced that people walk anywhere. Driving one block, four blocks, or further is not of consequence. There needs to be space for a one floor library where you can have room to sit, use computers, and not have elbows hitting someone else. Multiple floors create a lot of problems. Delivery is difficult in the building. A downtown location would be nice. It would help bring more people downtown.

What do you believe is the most equitable way for all Library users to finance Library costs and services?

- The best way is if the two adjoining townships would agree to one millage but it is not going to happen because both Big Rapids Township and Green Township are much opposed. It would probably need to be supported by Big Rapids City based on the political situation, but it truly should be a regional library supported by all. Knowing the local government situation I do not believe it is possible. It would be a miracle to be able to pull this off. The biggest opposition will come from the Big Rapids Township Supervisor. This is too bad and sad.
- The Library is used throughout the county but I am not familiar with how funding could be accomplished.
- There is no magic solution and that is the problem; will a district library board establish the Library elsewhere than in the City? Big Rapids Township officials are not interested and do not seem to want to cooperate and this is probably true also for Green Township.
- Residents in the surrounding townships do use the Library and should help to support it; make the area contiguous with everyone paying on an equal basis.
- Need to have a millage and perhaps even a somewhat lower total millage outside the City than inside it. A combination of taxes, grants and other resources would be positive. If the community sees that the Library is getting other funding besides taxes, this will help sell the package.
- There should be a library district including areas beyond the City. I was in Rockford recently and noted that the library there is part of a wider district library. This makes sense to me. Most political boundaries are invisible to the average citizen. It is usually the politician who knows the borders. Using only the City to support this will not create a large enough Library. There is the "I pay income tax to the City" argument, but I am not sure the Library really benefits from those taxes. The City does a great job in going after grant funds. Unfortunately this seems to have more to do with politics than finances.

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- I live in Big Rapids Township and favor a district library. People who live in the Township should help to pay for this service.
- I am a resident of Big Rapids Township and know our supervisor is not in favor of doing anything to get the Township involved as part of the solution. This was made very clear when a past effort to find a solution dissolved when the Township leaders did not show any support for finding a solution. The public library has a completely different role than the university library. The public library serves children and families, provides popular materials, fiction, books on tape, children's programs. Many people do not understand that the Ferris library does not provide these services. I believe our [Big Rapids Township] use of the Library is high and we do not pay proportionally our fair share of support in comparison to residents of the City.
- There is a lot of "turf" involved in this issue unfortunately. The support needs to come from a wider area outside of the City. For example, we created many years ago a county-wide hospital.
- Could you finance it totally from those who use it? Probably not. The district library approach is the most likely. My understanding was that at one point the City was not interested in this approach and wanted to fund it separately. But certainly setting up a district library creates some competition with other jurisdictions such as townships and school districts.
- Currently the major support does come from the City. I am a Township resident and believe that spreading support across the area makes the most sense. A tax for this purpose should be considered. The Library is a very important community organization and deserves community-wide support.
- If you use it, you ought to pay for it. The townships need to assist with the support of the Library. The majority of support now comes from City residents.
- I am big on regional cooperation but do not know how practical this can be given the area politics. As a City resident I see a need for regional support. User fees would turn people away. Spreading the cost over a larger area makes the costs lower for all.
- The most equitable way would be to have users pay for it, but of course that is not practical. A public library says a lot about a community much like support for a school system does. It is a "value added" service and funding a public library is part of the cost of being a democracy. Everyone should have a stake in it and help to pay for it.

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What do you feel is a fair amount for each household to pay for the Library on an annual basis? Do you think the average resident would be willing to pay \$8 per month to operate the Library? What about \$12 total to build a new Library and operate it? What is the monthly support “breaking point” where you believe the majority of voters would say “no”?

- I would certainly vote for it. Big Rapids is not in as bad a state as the rest of Michigan.
- I would vote for a millage but am not sure it would pass. One extra tax is a problem. The school district is already suffering. Then you add on Commission on Aging, ambulance, hospital, etc. This is cumulative and one more tax is difficult for many people.
- This is a very poor county – 2nd poorest in the state; that makes it difficult but it depends who votes. Good information would be essential to success.
- \$8.00 per month support does seem quite reasonable to me but may be seen by someone with very limited resources as just another hand in their pocket. There is a need to educate people as to exactly what the money will buy and why it is important to them.
- Need to keep the millage as low as possible; good to have federal or state dollars to match with local dollars as leverage. Getting more people to use the Library would help get more support; users are certainly more likely to support it. If you are at around \$100 a year or around that figure per household, that is sellable. Overcoming the automatic “no’s” is one challenge along with getting those who will support it to actually work to do so. There is a need for good information with pictures of what is and what could be.
- One mill or just above 1 mill may be supportable. Getting too much beyond a mill will be a stretch without a really good explanation of what it will buy. The problem is “one more mill for one more thing.”
- This area is one of the poorer areas in the state. \$50 to \$100 certainly would be reasonable. If it is the right type of facility that can generate more usage I believe there is support. But always not an easy thing to sell.
- I believe 1 mill or slightly above a mill could be sold to the public with a good campaign and reliable information. There will be a need to answer the questions such as “Why not just use the Ferris library?” or “Hasn’t the internet made the public library obsolete?”
- I would support a millage. Although I do not use the Library, I see the Library as an asset to the community. 1 mill should be supportable and maybe a bit above this that includes a building.
- Not an easy sell but 1 to 1.2 mills could be supported if people really know what the money will be doing for them.

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- A mill would not be outrageous. Perhaps an annual fee in addition for those who use the Library the most.
- Some people don't use it at all but this is an important public service that needs to be supported by everyone. It benefits the community as a whole. A vibrant library has a significant impact on all property values. It is an investment that benefits people that don't use it as well as those that do. Once you get past one mill in support, you will have a hard sell for this.
- I think a mill is a lot. I would prefer ½ mill based on what I think is sellable to the voter or at least under 1 mill.
- I have heard that the law allows 4 mills for a district library. But I believe up to a mill would be supportable and bearable for this community.

Many communities in Michigan have been successful in forming district libraries, composed of several governmental units cooperating to provide services and share costs over a larger geographic area. Do you believe this type of structure could be successful in Big Rapids? Why/why not?

- This structure makes sense to me but there would be much difficulty in getting it established; getting a township or the school district to partner with the City is not an easy task; but there are new people involved; the Library Committee would have to have very convincing facts and figures.
- One problem to overcome is having Ferris here; but looking at the school district and outlying townships as potential partners makes sense. Big Rapids itself does not have the tax base and needs a wider service area to support this effort.
- People are not going to vote in a district library; there are people who would favor this but they are in the minority; Big Rapids Township provides 90% of penal fines and state aid to support the Library plus its residents pay an income tax to the City.
- Yes, I am not sure of what other alternatives would be possible but sharing the expense across the entire area where users are coming from makes sense. I don't live in the City but realize that to have a good library there is a need for broader support. I remember a recent past effort to create a district library that was not supported by the townships. Unfortunately the "survey" that was done in Big Rapids Township was set up to get negative feedback from the residents just by the way it was worded.
- Yes, I am very much in favor of a district library (resident of Big Rapids Twp.).
- Absolutely. This is a great idea. Getting this accomplished is going to take a lot of work and cooperation.

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- There will need to be a major selling job to get this done. Getting township and/or school district officials to think about the public library as an important part of the education system and as an attractor for economic development is perhaps one approach. Also selling this as an “overall wellness” part of the community as an attractor for growth and development and to support the education of our kids.
- There is not an enormous amount of cooperation between Big Rapids Township and the City of Big Rapids. This is one of the challenges the City has in trying to get a district library established. This has to be the biggest hurdle to overcome. It is very difficult to pass any sort of millage in this area. The school district tried to pass a bond a few years ago to construct an athletic facility and other improvements such as technology, a band practice room and buses; there was a lot of hostility against the issue – especially when the second vote was held on the issue. The original school bond passed in about 1995 after a second vote; the first vote failed and the second proposal cut out the athletic field and reduced facilities for athletics along with certain other reductions. There is a cost involved in using Ferris facilities but it is not perceived that way by the public. So asking for taxes for any purpose is difficult.
- I think this is the only way Big Rapids is going to have a decent library. But getting cooperation from the townships is the key. But that route to getting this accomplished does not look promising.
- This is the structure we ought to have. It makes sense especially if the jurisdictions participating had representation on the board.
- A consortium of political jurisdictions may be a way to proceed. This will require cooperation and the ability to think area-wide rather than just

If there is one, what do you think is the most negative perception in the community about the Library?

- I don't have any negative perceptions nor have I heard any from others in the community. Perhaps because Ferris has a library and local residents are allowed to use it means that we are not as dependent on our public library for certain services.
- I do not hear anything negative; the staff is working very hard. The biggest negative is the public's view of the facility itself – it is unattractive. For kids it is not a cool place to go read or to hang out.
- The Library is not a place you will take a visitor or someone from a company or corporation who is considering locating in Big Rapids. You will avoid the Library because it broadcasts a negative image. The Library is operating on a shoe string; the staff is great but can only do so

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

much. I get frustrated with the hours of operation and cannot remember when the building is closed.

- The Library is only open 40 hours a week.
- Not really – maybe a mention of possible duplication of services between FLITE and the community Library; but I see the roles of each as being quite different.
- The staff is great but the facility is the negative and the lack of open hours – being closed on Monday. This is a heavily used Library and often when I am in the building it is being well-used. But our children and grandchildren deserve something much better.
- It is “good enough” for us.
- The antiquated facility; people do see that the building has outlived its useful purpose as a public library facility for the community but people may not be willing to pay for what they envision would be better.
- It may be a lack of perception. Many people do not notice the Library or care about it.
- I don’t feel that there is a negative. Perhaps it is the facility itself that is perceived by many as the real “negative.”

How would you compare the Big Rapids community Library with other public libraries you have visited or used?

- Ferris Library puts a big emphasis on computers and research. I have called and gotten great assistance for law library help. The staff has been fantastic in doing research and sending something back to me. Although Ferris is not a library for children or for popular type materials many are looking for at a public library.
- Spring Lake comes to mind but is something most likely beyond what Big Rapids could accomplish. Cheboygan has a very nice facility as well as Mt. Pleasant. Our Library is very much behind the times in comparison to many—even in smaller communities.
- Greenville (I believe it is called the Flat River Library) is a great example of what could possibly be done here.
- Look at what little Lakeview, Michigan has done. If they can be successful in creating a new library, then it should definitely be possible in Big Rapids. Many communities smaller than ours have libraries much better than we do. It is a matter of community pride for me that we have this important resource.
- I see what has been done in Fremont and even in Lakeview; Hastings has just built a new facility and may be a district library. [Consultant note: Hastings (population served is 13,033) just completed a new library facility at \$4,236,000 plus furnishings and equipment of approximately

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

\$515,000.] Other public libraries are so inviting with places to sit down and read, with meeting rooms for programs. These library buildings are “alive” and ours seems so “dead” in comparison.

- It is not serving the needs of the public in many areas including availability of computers, space to sit down and read, adequate restrooms, and hours of operation.
- That people do not think they need it. The non-users are not familiar with what is available. The other thing is that it is not user-friendly. It is not something you drive by and say “I need to turn around and look at what is inside.” There is a great library on Mackinaw Island. If this can be done on an island we should be able to do something better here in Big Rapids. When I go through a community I do see public library buildings that are attractive and this translates to me as a positive for how I perceive that community.
- The service I receive from the staff is second to none. The staff cares and does a great job. My spouse also gets great service from the staff. This is the most cramped and worse library facility I have ever been in.
- We need a larger, more accessible facility.

In your opinion, what steps should the Library Committee and Library Board take to develop support for an improved and expanded Library?

- It is difficult to advise them. I know they are visiting other libraries and carefully studying the issues. This is great. Many people I talk to believe that they should not just desert that building they are in now. But if there is clear information that the cost of rehabbing the building would cost more than replacing it with a similar sized facility, many would understand the economics to favor a new facility. Rescuing the building should not be the main emphasis of the Committee. People would understand facts. But there does appear to be sufficient space to expand the Library and perhaps use the second floor for meeting rooms. There is no reason that the Anna Howard Shaw statue cannot be moved to another appropriate community location. That makes the property available for an addition.
- The major outlet is the local paper but the Library group will need to do a lot of work by knocking on doors, making presentations, delivering the details to the public. Not just a typical media campaign but more person to person.
- Rehab the current building with a small addition off the back with parking behind the building. Utilize the older facility as offices. It is a fine old brick building. Some of the simpler problems such as dampness can be fixed for under \$2,000. Make the front entrance at the current

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

rear area of the building. We are too ready to give up on buildings that can be reutilized.

- There is a need for champions from the school district, ISD, Ferris, business community, City and townships to support an improved public library for this community. Keep hammering away about what the public library could provide such as study rooms and tutoring spaces, more programming for children.
- A good plan of action that truly informs people is needed; a thoughtful process is needed that provides time and venues for community input. Naysayers will always be there and be vocal. Document the process and show that input was solicited and considered.
- Making sure that the Committee develops good information showing how well the Library is used and perhaps showing how a new or renovated facility would increase use (perhaps with examples of this from other communities that have built new facilities). There is a perception that libraries are almost passé because of the internet. Show why the Library is still necessary and how it is being used and could be used more. If there is good evidence of public libraries being used more across the state and nation, be sure that this information is provided.
- Make sure there is support from the townships and having that support lined up prior to a public effort to get people to support it. This is a very difficult assignment, but some type of agreement will be needed in order to provide the means for establishing broader financial support and allowing for a public vote. It is time for this to happen. Cooperation is needed. We need to begin thinking about what is needed for our children and grandchildren and what we provide for them. What is our legacy going to be? That we saved \$12 a month or that we spent it for bettering the future of our community?
- We need a one-level, inviting, relaxing “take your time” type of facility that citizens will take pride in. The Committee is doing the right thing now and Mark Warba has gotten this moving again. A really good educational campaign, maybe with some type of video presentation is needed. Make sure to involve senior citizens, for example, at the senior citizen center. They are very active. The schools definitely should be behind this and must be a key factor in getting support. We need community champions to come forward to help. Concentrate on getting Big Rapids Township residents respected in the community to become involved.
- The Committee is taking the right steps now to involve the community and getting information out. I commend the individuals who are donating their time to take on this effort.
- I have not gotten the message about why a change is needed. Take the necessary baby steps to inform the community and take every opportunity to get the message out. Don't depend on the media but use

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

public meetings, club and association meetings, even neighborhood presentations. Improved services for children could be a major theme. Figure out a way to get the kids involved. Why is improvement needed? Why should I pay more?

- There is a need to show people very specifically how it will improve their lives, the community and the lives of their children and grandchildren.
- There are so many people in town that say: “The building was good enough for me, why is it not still good enough into the future?” There is a need to communicate to people that there are many things that could be done that are impossible because of the lack of a good useful facility. We need a building that would allow meeting room use with the Library being locked off. There is good visual aid equipment that could be used but cannot be used in the current building. The Committee needs to educate people as to how obsolete the current facility really is.
- Have information on single pages that is clear. Many people doubt that they are getting the straight story and that everything being presented has somehow been controlled from the start by a small group. Come up with ten or fifteen key facts that need to be considered. Do you renovate or not, do you move or not. Get this out to a broad community audience in every way you can communicate it. I have been stopped by a number of people who have said to me in one way or another that “the fix is in” and it all depended on who the mayor appointed to the Committee.

Any other comments you’d like to share with the Library Committee or Library Board?

- We have other examples in Big Rapids. What is now the Crossroads Charter Academy was the Big Rapids Middle School. They let general maintenance on the facility slip in order to sell the need for a new school. Citizens were told about the awful condition of the facility. And yet Crossroads came in and made a wonderful school out of it. This is fresh in people’s mind and is one example of the “old and decrepit” argument. Utilizing the current Library facility for, say, apartments would be a good use if cost of renovation as a library is high. There is a contingent of people who certainly support keeping the facility and would not support any effort to re-use it for another purpose or to take down or move the neighboring fraternity house for more property to construct a new library. The existing building, if reused, should not be student housing but should take on a compatible use. The look at Immanuel Lutheran Church was done, but that facility is not appropriate.
- We have expensive champagne tastes but with less than a bare bones budget – really no budget. The money is not there and this makes it a huge problem. People want to build an edifice without considering the

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

costs of them. We need to be realistic. Consider the exact needs – bigger is not always better.

- What about a private fundraising effort to complement public support? The community foundation should be involved. Any effort to solicit private support in perhaps a multi-year campaign would be viewed positively. The river walk is an example. Police and fire millage was passed and many thought it would not pass.
- In 1990 and 1991 there was an annexation fight between the City and Township with the City losing property when the Township “detached” land based on support from both Township and City residents. This and other actions have made relationships and cooperation between the City and townships difficult.
- The Friends have done a great job in helping to support the Library and setting up a fund in the community foundation for the Library. Couldn't the Library use more volunteers to help operate it and to allow for more hours of service?
- Maybe have users from outside the City pay a fee for library services.
- When the City income tax was initiated the City lowered property taxes by a substantial amount but this has crept back up and property taxes are nearly as high as they were when the income tax was set up. People are moving out of the City for lower taxes in the townships. The City is going to lose population in the 2010 census.
- There are people in the community who would provide some funds to help renovate or build a new facility. But this community does not have a lot of capacity for private donations.
- Big Rapids Twp. did a survey of its residents explaining the expected cost of the Library, what the Township budget is and the various services the Township provides including water and sewer. The Township runs all of the services with a budget of \$700,000 a year. 1.23 mills tax in the Township brings in \$138,000. A lot of Township residents work in Big Rapids and therefore pay an income tax to the City. Our survey indicated that a small number of our residents actually use the Library with many indicating they get most of what they need from the internet. Many residents indicated they use the Ferris Library.
- Promoting reading and literacy is a critical need in our community. The Library is certainly involved but with improved space could be more successful.
- Money has been raised for the local foundation, river walk, the arts, women's cancer awareness, etc. The capacity for the community to raise private money for the Library effort would be limited.
- There are not a lot of deep pockets in our community. It took four years to raise \$680,000 for the river walk project. A new Art Works project is aiming to raise close to \$1,000,000. An effort should be made to raise

BIG RAPIDS COMMUNITY LIBRARY INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

some private funds but this is a poor county. There are too many people out there trying to get a slice of the same piece of pie.

- It would be well worth trying to get something like this passed. It will take an enormous effort. The more informed the citizenry is, the better the chances. Figure out more ways to get people through the doors just to take a look at the facility and its problems. Pictures of the crowded conditions and lack of space. Comparison pictures of other area libraries to show what Big Rapids might have. Get a cadre of people signed up and providing help. No matter what approach you use, still many people will say that they didn't get the message. So there is no such thing as doing too much, such as knocking on doors, talking to groups, providing understandable literature.
- The Committee has a tough job to do. Convincing the public as to what a great resource the Library could be. The internet is not a substitute for a good public library and its services. We aspire toward improvements in our personal life. Why can't we translate this to improvements that our community clearly needs?
- We need to invest in our Library. It matters to our community. It needs to be a friendly hospitable place. The Library should be a cultural heart for the community where kids get a start with reading and books. The internet can never be a substitute for this. We need a different library with nice spaces, meeting rooms, something that attracts people to it.
- They need to get the word out. This involves a lot of leg work – getting people to understand and to go to the next level with you. This does not happen overnight and is very time intensive.