

F . A . Q . ' s

Big Rapids Community Library

Library Building questions:

1. Do we need a community library AND a university library (FLITE Library)?

Yes. The FLITE library and community library have different missions. The FLITE library's mission is to serve the students and faculty by providing research materials, equipment, facilities and hours that cater to the university. The community library provides both non-fiction and fiction reading materials, children's programs, popular literature, audio books, movies, literacy programs; its mission is to serve the general public and serve all age groups.

2. What's wrong with our current library building?

In a nutshell, it is too small and not configured well. There are also safety and code problems that need to be remedied. The community and our library consultants have raised a number of issues:

- *The useable library square footage is 8,000 versus nearly 18,000 s.f. in libraries in comparable sized communities. The basement in our library is not usable for library space because it does not meet the building code for ceiling height and while the elevator provides access to the restrooms, there are no other handicapped accessible exits.*
- *Patrons complain about the library being cramped, chaotic feeling, and not enough space for the children's area and for computers.*
- *The average number of computers for public internet use in other comparable libraries is 15; Big Rapids has 5. Computer use is in great demand at the library, but there is no more room for additional computers.*
- *The building was built to be a school. The floor loading capacity is 40 psf, however a library requires 150 psf. This forces the library to limit the number of bookshelves in some areas of the library. Floor reinforcement is required to safely display books in the middle of the floor in some rooms.*
- *It takes more personnel to supervise and staff a two-story building. Worse, Big Rapids ranks 19th out of 20 comparable libraries in staffing.*
- *The restrooms are in the basement and are accessed from an unsupervised part of the building. This location makes them unsafe if left unattended. The library staff now keeps them locked and escorts patrons to the restrooms. This further stretches the library staff's time. Moving them to the first floor will displace the library office/work space and will further crowd the building.*
- *On-street parking is inadequate and difficult for parents with children to use, and for the handicapped, especially in the winter. Ferris students compete for available parking spaces.*
- *The fire marshal identified a number of code problems that need to be addressed, including adding an emergency exit through a window opening. Since all wall space is used for book collections, this will further crowd and/or reduce the book collection.*
- *Being an old school, the library is divided into several rooms on each floor. This blocks the lines of sight for the staff. The library staff must be able to see and supervise the library for the safety of the patrons and for the protection of the collections. The load bearing walls cannot be removed to open up the floor plan of the existing building.*

3. We had an architectural study done in 2000 for a library addition, why do another one?
The public did not support a \$4 million dollar renovation and addition to the library in 2000. Structural analysis of the existing building and a needs assessment had not been done for the 2000 plan. We asked our engineering consultants to study the structural integrity of our existing building, and our library consultants to prepare several options for expanding and/or improving our existing library with a smaller construction budget. Our consultants did a needs assessment to determine what the community wanted in their library and what amount of cost they would support.
4. Why did the original report recommend 27,000 SF and now 16,000 SF is enough?
The original study re-used the existing library for meeting space, and office space, and added 11,000 square feet of new space to house the library collection. Large meeting room space does not need to be included in the current plan because the community now has adequate meeting room space at the Dept. of Public Safety and in the renovated City Hall. The consultants recommended that a 16,000 SF building is better aligned with what the community may support, and will be a significant increase over the actual 8,000 square feet of useable space in the current building.
5. We heard that our current library has 14,200 SF of space. Why is only 8,000 SF used?
The entire basement is off-limits to the public due to a number of code violations. The elevator provides access to the basement and restrooms. However, there are no handicapped accessible exits in case of an emergency when the elevator is made unavailable. The large stairway in the center of the building, stairs in the front entry and foyer space, and space for walls further reduce the building's usable square footage.
6. Is there enough room on the current library site for an addition to the library and parking?
Yes there is. However, a majority of the committee and the consultants have several concerns:
 1. *The existing library's first floor is above street level. Any building addition at street level would need ramps to reach the existing library's main floor. Perhaps a ramped entry from the parking area would provide a means of getting to this higher level. While we can overcome access issues, we will still have a multi-story library building, which is not desirable for a library (see question 7 below).*
 2. *Mature trees surround the existing building to the west and north. A parking lot on either side will remove many of the existing trees on the property. Storm water retention requirements, if met above ground, will require re-grading a large area to hold storm water and remove more trees. We heard from citizens that the park-like setting is important to preserve.*
7. Why not build a two story library to conserve space?
A two story building is feasible, but not desirable for a library in our size range. We learned from visiting other libraries, talking to many librarians, and from our consultants that one-story libraries have several advantages:
 - *Fewer staff members are required to monitor library space; since personnel costs are a significant part of any library's budget, a multi-story building will be more costly to operate in the long term.*
 - *Elevator costs, maintenance, and space are not required*
 - *Stairway costs, safety concerns, and space are not required*
 - *Large libraries are often multi-story buildings, however their operational budgets are much higher. Land prices and site constraints often out-weigh the advantage of a one story building.*

8. Is a one story building cheaper to build than a two story library building?
Yes. Because of the floor loading requirements, 150 psf, it is cheaper to build on grade than build the heavily reinforced floors required for a second story. A one story building also does not require an elevator. Elevators can cost in the neighborhood of \$100,000, and require annual maintenance and inspections. Fewer staff members are required to staff one floor, thus saving payroll cost. Utility costs are slightly higher in a single story building. However, using an energy efficient design and materials, plus the lower staffing costs, will more than offset the energy costs in a single story vs. a two story building.

Library Funding questions:

1. How is the library funded now?
The library receives money from the City of Big Rapids (\$240,000), County penal fines from the Townships the library contracts with (\$123,591), State Aid (\$13,614), library fines/fees/misc. (\$23,501).
2. Why do we need to change the funding structure?
Residents of the City of Big Rapids carry the lion's share of the burden in supporting the library. The City appropriated \$240,000 in 2007/2008 but cannot continue to appropriate that amount. While the City provides 60% of the funding, 78% of the items circulated out of the library are to non-city residents. The Townships provide 31% of the funding. The Library Committee is investigating how to spread the cost out equitably among a larger population, specifically among all the library users.
3. What other options are there besides a city library and a district library?
There are County Libraries, and School District Public Libraries. However, since Proposal A passed, school districts are not allowed to levy a separate millage to support a library. Therefore School District libraries have not been established since Proposal A passed because they cannot afford to fund them out of school district general funds.
4. What is a district library?
Two or more municipalities enter into an agreement to form an autonomous District Library Board. The District Library Board becomes a new municipal entity, entirely responsible for providing funding, insurance, and building maintenance for the library. The District Library Board is represented by members that are either appointed or elected. They determine the boundaries of the district library, how the Board members are elected or appointed, if a new library is desirable, where it should be located, and whether to put a millage proposal on the ballot.
5. Why does the majority of the Library Committee feel this is the best funding option?
A larger pool of people – namely all the people that are within the library's district, would fund the library. The cost of supporting a community library would be spread out, making it less expensive for everyone.
6. Will my taxes go up? *Yes, if district residents vote to support a district library.*
7. Can the new district library board have input on the location of the new library building?
Yes.
8. Can the district library board automatically add a tax for the library?
NO – the district library board can put a millage tax proposal on the ballot but it REQUIRES a majority of "yes" votes from the library district residents before it becomes a tax.

9. I hear district libraries tax people at the rate of 4 mills – is that going to happen? *District libraries by law have a millage cap of 4 mills (instead of the 2 mills for other types of public libraries). However, only TWO libraries in Michigan tax at 4 mills – and did so before they became district libraries. The vast majority of Michigan’s public libraries operate on less than 2 mills.*

The consultants have recommended a district-wide millage rate of approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ (.75) mills for operation of the Big Rapids Community Library. A home that is worth \$150,000 (market value) is taxed on its “taxable value” which is \$75,000. That homeowner would pay \$ 56.25 per year to support the library, less than \$5.00 per month.

<u>Average Taxable Values</u>	Amount for <u>.75 of 1 mill</u>	Amount for <u>1 mill</u>
\$45,000	\$ 33.75	\$ 45.00
\$75,000	\$ 56.25	\$ 75.00
\$100,000	\$ 75.00	\$100.00

Library Location questions:

- Why did the majority of the Library Committee feel that moving the library to the downtown site is the best option?
 - The property is already owned by the city and therefore does not require purchasing property, nor does it take property off the tax rolls.*
 - Existing, adequate, parking is available, and storm water infrastructure already exists. Thus site development costs are lower.*
 - The library would add another destination, and “anchor” to the downtown.*
 - The library would be within walking distance from schools and many residents.*
 - Instead of spending money to renovate the existing library to bring it up to code and relocate the bathrooms, the money can be put towards developing a larger and more suitable library facility. There is interest in redeveloping the existing library building into housing. This would be an appropriate use in the residential neighborhood it is located in.*
- Will the City lose grant money by building the library on the downtown site? *No, if it is built after 2012.*
- Isn't there enough parking already for the library in its current location? *The feedback the committee and the consultants received from library users is NO. During summer reading program events there is not enough parking along the street. During the school year, library patrons compete for parking spaces with students. On-street parking is especially difficult, and dangerous, for parents with small children and strollers. The snow build-up along the curb in the winter makes it difficult to get out from the passenger side of vehicles. The gravel parking behind the building is not handicap accessible and is far from the main building entrance.*