

**BOULDER PUBLIC LIBRARY MASTER PLANNING PROCESS
SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**

September 9, 2002

The extended Master Planning Committee met on August 30, 2006 for a second focus group discussion. Participants included Lisa Sobieniak, Lando Archibeque, Bruce Staff, John Culshaw, Darren Smith, Steve Clason, Ann Aber, Robert Beebe, Nadia Haddad, Tom Spencer and Rhonda Wallen. Also in attendance were staff members Liz Abbott, Sam Hartman, Jennifer Miles, Steve Austin, Jim Marshall and Lynn Reed. Sharon McClew facilitated the discussion. The following is a summary of key points from the discussion. Note: *Items in italics were mentioned by multiple participants.*

Value of the Library

The first part of the discussion focused on the value of the Boulder Public Library to individuals and to the community.

1. What does the BPL provide that is most important to you personally?

Participants identified the following things about the Boulder Public Library that are most important to them personally:

- *BPL is the best source of education for adults outside of the university or college.*
 - There is a great variety of materials.
 - There is free access to Library resources by all community members, which supports the values of the community.
 - Provides great source of information to students (comment by a teacher/media specialist in BVDS).

- *BPL is a special "place" that helps create "community."*
 - It is located in a beautiful, central location and provides a variety of resources

- *BPL offers entertainment and fun.*
 - One participant felt it is the "most fun place in Boulder."
 - There is a wide range of concert, movies and cultural events.
 - There is wonderful programming, including children's programming.

- *BPL provides information that supports people with their hobbies.*

- BPL is a good source of information for kids.

2. What does the BPL provide that is most important to us as a community?

In addition to what was identified in the first question, the following items were identified as being of high importance to the community:

- *BPL does cultural outreach programming and the collection includes materials in languages other than English, especially Spanish.*
 - The Boulder Reads Program was given as an example.

- *The Carnegie Branch serves as the archive for Boulder's history.*

- *The PROSPECTOR System is an electronic portal that allows access to the resources of other libraries. Interlibrary Loan also is available to access items not available through PROSPECTOR.*
- BPL provides access to computers.
- BPL provides programs that encourage and teach children to read.
 - The foundation of our educational system is schools and libraries.
 - These provide the basis for maintaining our liberties.

Funding Trade-Offs

The next portion of the discussion focused on funding trade-offs, and was preceded by the following introduction:

Given the reality of limited financial resources, the Boulder Public Library may not be able to provide everything that is valued by its users. Difficult trade-offs need to be looked at in the master planning process. Cumulative budget reductions in 2003 – 2005 have resulted in cuts that have significantly impacted key Library services or have limited the ability to develop key services. Some of the most important examples are:

- Children's Library Services:
 - There is insufficient staffing to help children in the Main Library during peak times.
 - Children's story hours, programs and outreach have been reduced.
 - The ability to keep the children's collection up to date has been negatively impacted.
- Branch Libraries:
 - Neighborhood branches (Meadows, Reynolds and Carnegie) each have been closed one day per week.
- Development of a "Virtual Library Branch" via the BPL Website:
 - The importance of providing library services remotely and providing different types of quality digital information has increased dramatically in the last few years.
 - Given current trends, the BPL website could evolve into a relatively full-service, 24/7 online branch library. However, to maintain a website that is technically up to date and provides easy-to-access, current information requires more resources than are available.

3. If you had to make a choice among providing new funding to children's services, branch hours or website development, what would you fund and why?

- *Most of the discussion focused on the need to fund children's services and technology, with the group somewhat split between the two and with some individuals seeing both as important.*
- Regarding Children's Services, comments included:
 - It is essential to educate children.
 - Pre-teen and teen services are also needed.
 - It is important to have sufficient staff to deliver current services.

- Two ideas presented were: 1) to have story time in the Auditorium in order to serve more children at the same time; and 2) to educate adults who accompany children to the Library so they can do some of the tasks that staff would normally do.
- Comments were made by two participants who use children's services, that even with the staff cuts, service is still very good and the area never seems understaffed.
- Regarding Technology, comments included:
 - There is a threshold issue with technology. A certain amount is necessary to spend in order to be more efficient.
 - Technology is critical in terms of delivering information services and the BPL's current database interfaces are clunky.
 - With technology, you either have to keep it up to date or don't have it at all. If you can't get information efficiently, then you are wasting money.
 - Technology must keep up, but not be cutting edge. That is too risky for a public library. It should pay for itself if possible.
- *A strong central library was seen as more critical than the branches in a community this size. At least one person felt branches are a luxury.*
- The point was made that it is important to ask the question: How can we do what we want to do without more resources?
- Although most of the discussion up to this point focused on Children's Services and Technology, at least one participant voiced his support for branch libraries.

Following this discussion, some additional information was provided concerning each of the three services (see attachments).

**4. Does this information change or influence your opinion about the funding trade-offs?
5. What factors should be considered in evaluating these kinds of trade-offs?**

- Although the additional information did not seem to shift opinions, the value of the branches was certainly acknowledged more broadly once participants saw the usage at the branches. (Several participants have no experience with the branches.)
- The following information was identified as important in looking at these trade-offs:
 - *What is happening with online services? What is the utilization of the BPL databases? What are users not able to do online that they want to do?*
 - *How can the BPL do what it needs to do without additional resources? A "zero-additional cost" approach needs to be examined.*
 - What is the cost per patron hour at Main and at each of the branches?
 - What is the utilization of the various resources?
 - What percentage of the collection at Main and at each of the branches is circulated at least once in a given period of time and how do these compare?
 - In the Children's Collection, how many books are checked out per visit?
 - What is the number of visits per branch?
 - Why is the number of library visits leveling off?
 - What is the estimated capacity for the collection at Main?

- What are the numbers and percentages of households in Boulder with computers and with internet access?
- What percent of the items circulated by the BPL are not owned by BPL? What is the trend in these numbers?
- Perhaps it is important to look at expanded hours at Main versus more hours at the branches.

Service Models & Facilities

The next part of the discussion focused specifically on the library branches.

6. How important are full-service branches in meeting the community's needs for information?

The following comments were made:

- *Based on the usage statistics, the branches seem to be very important.*
- *The branches have value as a "place" that provides a sense of community.*
- *Branches are important to seniors, youth and others who can't travel. It is a good "after school" place.*
- Branches are valuable to neighborhoods because of proximity and convenience.

7. What if there were no branches other than the Main Library and the library website (virtual branch)?

- Having branches was seen as a quality of life issue.
- The following possible disadvantages were identified:
 - Many kids would have no place to go after school.
 - There probably would be more people driving to get to the Main Library.
 - Would there be fewer books and service points?
- The following possible advantage was identified:
 - It could be an advantage having everyone come to the same place.

8. What if un-staffed service points (such as book drop-offs, kiosks, etc.) were distributed throughout the community, rather than full-service branches?

- Although at least one person was open to looking at kiosks, more self-service and other approaches to delivering services, in general, *un-staffed service points were not seen as desirable by the group.*
 - *There was strong agreement that having a physical place for people to gather together is very important. It helps create community. Having branches as "social nodes" could become even more important in the future.*

- Concerns were raised about security at un-staffed service points. (It was noted that service points would have to be in buildings that are staffed, such as at a King Soopers.)
 - The question was asked if having un-staffed service points is practical.
 - It was felt that a lot is lost by not having a person available to answer questions and help patrons.
 - There was concern even about a remote book drop-off, in that it could require a lot of staff time to pick up the books and could delay getting the books back into circulation.
- The idea was raised of trying to negotiate a “Netflix for Libraries” service.

9. What would it take to educate the community about the need for a new service delivery model for library services?

- *The process should be as transparent as possible and involve the community.*
 - There would need to be a lot of public involvement early on.
 - There would need to be a series of meetings.
 - In-depth newspaper coverage would be needed to educate the public about the issues.
- A well thought-out marketing/education process would be needed.
 - It needs to be done at a high level (can’t get into the details).
 - Focus on the positives.
- *It is important to evaluate a range of possible funding models.*
 - Would businesses sponsor various things? For example, a business might sponsor the subscription to the Wall Street Journal database. Or a business might expand its license to cover the BPL.
 - Are there some services that could generate revenues without negatively impacting the library’s mission of providing “free and equal” access to information?
 - There should be information on the BPL website about opportunities for giving. There is a need to educate users about the costs of providing a quality library and that increased costs for energy means that there is less money available for other things.
 - *Could the role of the Foundation be expanded?*
 - The Foundation needs a website that is linked to the BPL website.
 - Would there be an impact on City funding if the Foundation were more visible?
 - *At least two participants asserted that they believe library funding is a governmental responsibility.*

FUNDING TRADE-OFFS ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

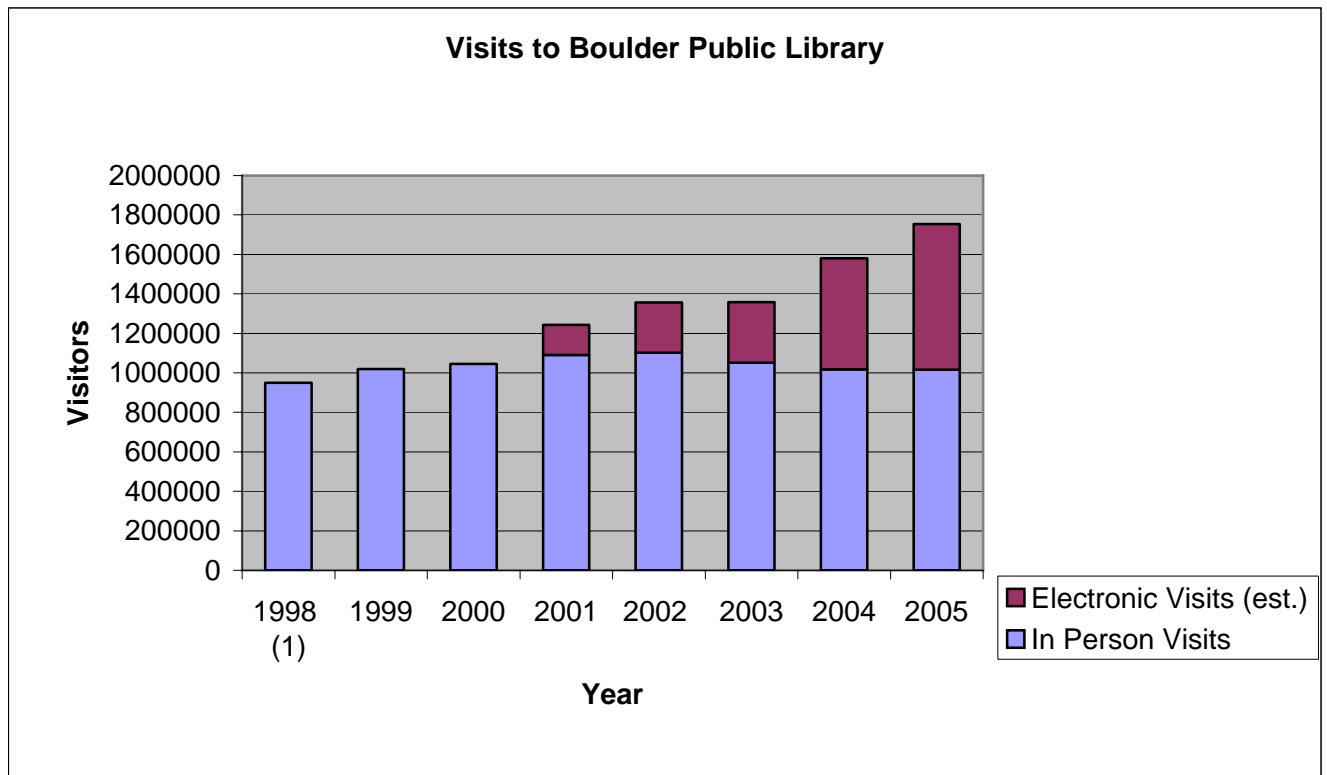
Branch Usage

	MAIN LIBRARY: 2005	MEADOWS AND REYNOLDS BRANCH LIBRARIES - COMBINED: 2005
Size of Collection (all media types, incl. Children's collection)	332,476 items 82% of total library collection	71,687 items 18% of total library collection
Circulation: # Items Checked Out (all media types, including Children's)	847,312 items 78% of total circulation	241,192 items 22% of total circulation
Number of Visits	750,239 visits 77% of total library visits	223,644 visits 23% of total library visits
Facility Size	92,000 s.f. 84% of total library space	17,800 s.f. 16% of total library space

FUNDING TRADE-OFFS ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Library Web Usage

- 87% of BPL users knew that many library services could be accessed electronically, from a remote location. (Library User Survey, February 2006)



FUNDING TRADE-OFFS ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Children's Services

- The 2000 census found 21% of Boulder households reported having children under 18 years old living at home.
- 31% of library users reported having children under 18 years old living at home (Library User Survey, February 2006).
- No one BPL facility draws significantly more users with children when compared to other BPL facilities (Library User Survey, February 2006).

	MAIN LIBRARY: 2005	MEADOWS AND REYNOLDS BRANCH LIBRARIES - COMBINED: 2005
Size of Children's Collection	89,551 items; 30% of total Main Library collection	22,826 items; 35% of total combined branch collection
Circulation: # Items Checked Out (Children's materials only - all media types)	231,256 children's items checked out; 27% of all items circulated at Main library	64,652 children's items checked out; 27% of all items circulated at branches

- **Children's items actually make up a higher proportion of the total branch collections than are found at main.**
- **The circulation of children's materials at main and the branches corroborates the 2006 survey findings that no one BPL facility draws significantly more users with children when compared to other BPL facilities.**