

BOULDER PUBLIC LIBRARY
FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY – STAKEHOLDER REPRESENTATIVES

April 24, 2006

A focus group discussion was held on Monday, April 24 with members of the Library Master Planning Committee and other representatives of key stakeholder groups. Participating were:

- Ann Aber – former Library Commission member
- Lando Archibeque – Library Master Planning Committee (community representative for Hispanic/marginalized communities); Librarian at CU's Auraria Campus and past president of Colorado REFORMA
- Robert Beebe – frequent Library patron (travels and has visited many libraries around the country)
- John Culshaw – CU Technology Librarian
- Anne Marie Jennings – Library Master Planning Committee (community representative for youth)
- Sharon King – Library Master Planning Committee (representative for economic vitality); Director of Boulder Chamber of Commerce's Small Business Development Center
- Len Scrogan – Library Master Planning Committee (representative of BVSD administration); BVSD Director of Instructional Technology
- Lisa Sobieniak – Library Master Planning Committee (representative of BVSD media specialists); Media Specialist at Centennial Middle School
- Bruce Staff – Library Foundation Board and former Library Commissioner
- Rhonda Wallen – frequent Library patron and business woman

This summary documents major points made while the group answered the focus group questions. Items in italics indicate strong agreement among participants.

Note: In general, there was a difference in perception between those participants who have worked closely with the Library on the Commission, Foundation and/or Master Planning Committee and those who know the Library only through heavy usage. The Library patrons were more likely to say the BPL is well-funded and has a depth and breadth of resources (compared to many other libraries and for a community this size.) They were also less likely to agree that Main should be expanded, more branches added, more computers added, etc. One comment was: "When is enough, enough?"

1. What factors (either internal or external) help the Boulder Public Library to be successful? What are the organization's most significant strengths?

- *BPL has a lot of resources for a community this size.*
 - *Breadth and numbers of materials.*
 - *Broad range of programming.*
 - *Friendly, knowledgeable staff to help patrons, even given the budget cuts.*
 - *Compared to many libraries, BPL is well-funded.*
- *Customer service is very good. Staff is approachable, helpful and can answer questions. Staff members often address patrons by name.*
- *Senior administrative staff members are knowledgeable, experienced and hard-working.*
- *The Library is more than just books.*
 - *It is a community center.*
 - *It is an arts center.*

- *There are other tools that are helpful to patrons such as “Books by Mail” and the website.*
- *Everything is free.*
- *There is a Foundation that helps fund the broad range of programming (concerts, movies, etc.)*
- There is strong community support. In surveys, the Library has ranked third behind Police and Fire as an important City service.)
- There are outreach programs to BVSD.
 - Librarians come to speak to the school librarians.
 - They bring new books that the school librarians can review before ordering.
- The Main Library is a very attractive building.
- BPL offers free wireless Internet service.
- Carnegie is doing oral history and digital projects.
- BPL is outward-oriented – to the BVSD, other libraries, etc.
- Travel materials are kept up-to-date.

2. In what ways does the BPL need to improve? What are the Library’s most significant weaknesses or obstacles?

- *Main Library needs to be reconfigured and/or expanded. (Not everyone agreed.)*
 - Main library is very noisy.
 - There should be a dedicated children’s area.
 - Library should be reconfigured to address how people use the Library.
 - There is a lack of space and resources to attract middle school and high school students. (Louisville has a Poetry Program for teens.)
 - Parking is a problem and it will get worse.
- Funding is a major weakness, given the budget and staffing cuts over the last 4 – 5 years.
 - Given that the BPL is part of the City and the City’s revenues are heavily based on sales tax revenues, the Library’s funding is impacted by Boulder’s economy.
 - There are users of the Library who live in unincorporated Boulder County or outside of Boulder who do not contribute to the funding of the Library through taxes.
 - There are fewer resources available in Children’s Services to visit schools.
- There is limited access to the electronic databases because of a limited number of licenses. Every spot always seems to be taken.
 - There is a need for a meta-search capability for all of the databases.
 - There is an opportunity to add more business-oriented databases.
 - Library needs databases to meet the needs of elementary and middle school youth.
- There is a lack of computers.
- The relationship between the BPL and CU is not as tight as it could be. This is a missed opportunity. (For example, in San Jose, the public library shares a building with the university.)

- The BPL needs more and better ways to attract non-English speakers and other under-served populations.
- There is a perception that books are not current enough and/or that there are not enough copies available. (What is the average age of BPL's books and how does that compare with other comparable libraries?)
- BPL needs more audio books.

3. What external trends or issues do you think will have the greatest impact on the Library over the next 5 – 10 years?

- Today's youth will do their research on the Internet, not from books.
 - How does the BPL compete in the age of Google?
 - How do we teach people how to evaluate information resources?
 - How do we educate people on the electronic resources available at the Library?
- There will be demands for new services from the Millennium Generation, such as blogs, pod casts, utilization of the latest technology, etc.
 - There will need to be marketing and outreach to this population.
- The cost of resources such as journals and electronic databases and software will become a larger part of the budget. These expenses are not one-time (such as buying a book), but are an annual cost of licensing, which can be very expensive.
- There will be increased digitalization of visual data.
- There is rapid obsolescence of technology hardware and the prices are dropping fast.
- There is a national trend that new libraries are being built with less square footage than in the past, under the assumption that more information will be provided electronically.
- There may continue to be an erosion of privacy rights in this country.
- The anti-immigration movement will probably continue and could impact the Library's collection and outreach efforts.
 - Will a person's right to use the Library be impacted?
- At the same time, there will be a growing number of Latinos in the community.
- Traffic and parking will continue to worsen.
- There will be continued population growth in north Boulder (and no library branch).
- In Boulder, there will be fewer children and the population will be getting older.
- There is a "graying" of library patrons.
- In Colorado and the nation, there are fewer librarians in public schools.
- There may be opportunities to join with other organizations to create greater purchasing power and to share resources.
 - It may be necessary to identify which organization will do what, so there is not duplication of services.

- We are already seeing the “Starbuck-ification” of libraries. BPL will need to decide how it will address this trend.

4. Are there significant unmet needs in the community that BPL should try to address over the next 10 years?

- Library space for teens.
- Programming to attract a more diverse patron base and underserved populations.
- There is an opportunity to do more with small business owners. They don’t know what is available at the Library.
- There is demand for more computers with free internet access. (This was questioned: When is enough, enough?)
- There is demand for more licenses for software products and databases.
- There is demand for more community meeting space.
- There is a need for more parking at the Main Library.
- We need a rational placement of branches.
- Library funding – there are municipalities that don’t provide library services for their residents and don’t help to support the libraries their residents use.

5. How do you think BPL is viewed in the community? What is its reputation or image? (If negative, what can be done to improve its image and reputation?)

- *Library is well regarded in the community. There is a lot of community support.*
- *Lots of people don’t know about the resources and programming at the BPL.*
 - Personal testimony is powerful.
 - Ensure that every child receives a Library Card.
 - Have a courier service between the BPL and the schools.
- People are not aware of the collections culling that took place about a year and a half ago and how much easier it is to navigate Library resources. We need to bring back people who were frustrated and stopped coming.

Other Comments/Ideas:

- How does the BPL measure ROI (return on investment)?
 - What are the measurable impacts of the Library (not just in terms of numbers)?
 - What are the metrics that should be used? Metrics need to be expanded to show the efficacy of the BPL.
 - It’s important to measure online usage as well as usage of the physical locations.
- BPL needs to be clear about its mission.
 - A primary goal is to bring people together.
- There is the PATRIOT Act and the flag incident of a few years ago. What else is out there?