

Section 1

THE CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC LIBRARY BUILDING

A building, in its simplest form, is a series of spaces, some defined by enclosure, and some defined only by use. The success of the whole is dependent upon a organization of these spaces, maintaining their principles, relationships, and most importantly, their aesthetic concerns. These are principles that give the building individualism and special meaning. If this premise is indeed realized, the new Searcy Public Library building has the potential to be one of the most significant civic structures in the greater Searcy and White County community.

Typical Services & Functions

A quality library facility must provide a harmonious balance of public service areas and the necessary support spaces. A library that expects to serve its residents deep into the 21st century must also provide a healthy array of information technologies and public meeting spaces to go along with books and other forms of media. Therefore, there must be considerable adaptability within the design to permit adjustment for new services, furnishings, and equipment over time.

The following is a sampling of typical public library uses and functions that take place in many public library buildings. Many of these will take place in the new Searcy Public Library.

- A high school debate team preparing for the state tournament;
- Users of all ages at the state-of-the-art PCs “surfing the net” and accessing a variety of resources via the Internet;
- A staff member of a community non-profit organization at a study table researching a strategy for a grant application to a national foundation;
- A couple returning materials to the Library Customer Service Desk and browsing for new materials in the Hot off the Press area;
- A librarian requesting materials via an online, interlibrary loan database;
- Two high school students using both print-on-paper materials and electronically accessible databases for a class project on Arkansas history;
- An English-As-A-Second Language class making a group visit to tour the Library;
- Library staff and volunteers re-shelving materials;
- A group of pre-kindergarten children experiencing the excitement of learning while enjoying picture book time in the Storytime area;
- Middle school students surveying the poetry of Robert Frost; and
- A young parent reading a new magazine while his/her child is seeking a photograph of Stonehenge on one of the PCs.

Libraries Require Smart Buildings

The public library building of today and tomorrow, regardless of size, must accommodate the traditional collections and functions long associated with library service while reflecting the technical flexibility and requirements of smart buildings. Libraries must address the dramatic changes in information technologies, especially library technologies and the digitization of text. As technology has become more sophisticated, so have society at-large, and public library users in particular. Smart buildings have the potential to free staff from facilities management

tasks so they can focus more time on customer service.

While more information can be stored in less space, a higher level of demand for a wider range of materials and the furniture and equipment needed to realize the full potential of information technology has offset this condensation of information, as far as library space needs are concerned. For example, Library staff will often be asked if space and a computer network are available for connecting a library user's laptop computer.

The Library as Community Center

The new Searcy Public Library should provide a harmonious balance of public service areas and the necessary support spaces. The modern, contemporary public library building of today is a true community center, regularly visited day in and day out by more people than any other place in the community.

Striking a Balance. The spaces within the facility for the customers should be varied and inviting. The furnishings and equipment should be arranged so as to balance the needs of the customer for access in relation to the Library's operational needs for controlling that access.

Service Area Population Projections. The new Searcy Public Library will serve a community estimated to grow to between 30,000 and 35,000 persons by the year 2036. The population of White County is projected to reach 95,000 – 103,000 by 2036. The needs for a population of that size will be many and diverse. The design of the new Library will need to be adaptable to these diverse and changing needs if it is to serve the community effectively for years to come.

Service Area Demographics Projections. The ethnicity of Searcy is primarily Anglo (86.8% in the 2010 Census). Blacks account for 7.5 percent and Hispanic/Latino of any origin 4.6 percent. The age cohorts, based on 2014 estimates by the Census Bureau, are:

- Age 5 and younger – 6.2 percent;
- Age 18 and younger – 20.5 percent; and
- Age 65 and above – 14.7 percent.