

THE PUBLIC SPEAKS

The Snow Library, Orleans, Massachusetts, engaged Godfrey's Associates, Inc., to prepare a Space Planning Feasibility Study. Richard L. "Dick" Waters was the principal consultant for the study. The consultant made his initial site visit to the Library the week of September 21, 2009.

During that time he:

- Interviewed the Library Director
- Conducted a series of focus group discussions and two open forum sessions
- Toured the building
- Inventoried the building (counting chairs, tables, display cases, computers, etc.).

Sixty-one persons participated in the Focus Groups and the Open Forums.

Subsequent to the site visit, the Library Director forwarded to the consultant public responses from two surveys. An online survey was sent electronically. That survey had already been tabulated. The second survey, an In-Library instrument, was not tabulated. The consultant tabulated the survey.

THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Prior to the site visit the consultant sent the Library Director a draft set of questions for the discussions along with a draft of a "Library Service Response Ranking" form he planned to use with each group.¹

Because each group was different in terms of background, age, and the like it was only natural that each discussion would take on a life of its own. Nonetheless, the consultant was able to ask each group most of the questions and to have each group respond to the Service Ranking form.

The Focus Groups, by affinity, were:

- Library Trustees, Friends of the Library and Endowment
- Library Staff
- Senior Citizens
- High School and Middle School Students
- Parents and Grandparents
- Adult Users of the Library
- Community Officials/Business Groups
- Local Groups/Art Groups.

¹ See the Appendices for the Focus Group questions and the Library Services Response Rank form.

SUMMARY OF ALL FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND OPEN FORUM SESSIONS

Strengths of the Snow Library – CLAMS was universally praised, and was the location of the Library and being open on Mondays. Other strengths often cited were the helpfulness and knowledge of the staff, programming, and the Friends of the Library and their contributions.

Weaknesses of the Snow Library – Without question, the absence of an adequate number of parking spaces was the number one weakness. Other weak points often expressed was the smallness of the Children’s Services area, the adult fiction collection arrangement in the basement (and the fact that it was even in the basement), the limited number of computers and inadequate work space at the computers, and not enough work space for the Library staff.

Needed Improvements – Topping the list was to locate the fiction collection to a more accessible location in the building, be open on Sunday², and enlarge the areas for children and teens.

Computers in the Library – Computers are a positive development.

Why Not More Use of the Snow Library – Inadequate parking, not enough evening open hours, people do not read, and the

² As a result of budget constraints, the Snow Library had to suspend its Sunday hours.

Library is not a priority for young families were the most frequently mentioned reasons.

Other Comments – No one indicated that the Snow Library building was historically significant. Purchasing a new site, better coordination with the school system(s), and close on a weekday in order to be open on Sundays.

SUMMARY OF LIBRARY RELATED FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (Trustees, Friends, Endowment, Staff)

Strengths of the Snow Library – The Library is a community center with friendly and helpful staff, a great location, the Director’s ability to “... plug people in” were also frequently cited, as was the opinion that it’s other strengths were the programs, Friends, CLAMS, and book sales.

Weaknesses of the Snow Library – The summer people are very demanding, there is a lack of storage space, the Teen area too small and noisy, the arrangement of books on the lower level is confusing, the, non-fiction collection is split up in too many places, being open only two evenings a week, shelves too crowded, inadequate parking, a Friends space that is much too small, not enough computers, and the infrastructure is inadequate were the primary identified weaknesses.

Needed Improvements – Bigger and better space for Teens, improved rest rooms, and more outlets for laptops.

Why Not More Use of the Snow Library – Not enough parking and an inadequate number of evening open hours were the reasons expressed most often.

Other Comments – The Snow Library is two libraries in one; September – May used by locals and those in nearby communities. June – August by the summer visitors. Have a branch library for Children’s Services, many now have their needs met, so see no need for improvements, Library café would make the building more attractive to young people, have a Library Store operated by the Friends.

THE OPEN FORUM SESSIONS

There were a total of 16 in attendance at the two Open Forum sessions.

Strengths of the Snow Library – Like the Focus Groups, CLAMS was praised, as was the staff. The book sales were referenced, as were the art exhibits and the museum passes.

Weaknesses of the Snow Library – The number of parking spaces was the number one weakness. People who use the Library as their “office” were seen as interfering with quiet reading spaces. The 10:00 AM opening hour should be earlier, and the lack of a place to have a conversation with a tutor and the person be tutored was another weaknesses mentioned, along with the lack of storage and shelf space.

Needed Improvements – More books, more computers with greater efficiencies and software updates, computers in the

Children’s area, a place for beverages, and more evening hours were the improvements most often requested.

Computers in the Library – Computers have become part of the “landscape” and students require them. Thus, they are a positive development.

Why Not More Use of the Snow Library – Inadequate parking, not enough evening open hours, people do not read, lack of time for working families who are also raising children, and lack of signage directing people to the Library were the whys of there not being more usage of the Library.

Other Comments – Close one weekday in order to be open on Sunday drew a mixed response when the idea was articulated.

THE LIBRARY SERVICES RESPONSES RANKINGS

During each Focus Group and Open Forum a list of 14 library service responses was distributed to the participants along with a verbal explanation of how to complete the form. The participants were asked to rank the five services they believed were most important for the Snow Library to offer in order, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. Next, they were to indicate two services that they believed were not at all important, and that the Library should not offer under any circumstances. These two were to be indicated by an X.

The consultant tabulated each of the responses using a point system that allocated five points for the numbers ones, four points for the number twos, etc. The Xs were recorded, but no points taken away because of an X.

SUMMARY OF ALL RESPONSES

The top five responses and the top two Xs are listed here. See Appendix E for further information.

<i>Service Response</i>	<i>Total Points</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Total Xs</i>
General Information	226	1	1
Current Topics & Titles	173	2	1
Lifelong Learning	128	3	1
Commons	83	4	7
Community Partner	81	5	11

Library Staff Responses

The consultant believes it is instructive to determine if the staff of the library being studied differs in any substantial way with the public.

<i>Service Response</i>	<i>Total Points</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Total Xs</i>
General Information	41	1	0
Current Topics & Titles	37	2	0
Commons	17	3	1
Basic Literacy	16	4	1
Lifelong Learning	13	5	0

There were minimal differences. Community Partner, the fifth ranked service by all participants' garnered only minimal response from the Library staff – three total points and three Xs. On the other hand, Basic Literacy had 79 points from the total of all, and would have ranked sixth. There were, however, 10 Xs in the overall summary.

THE TWO SURVEYS

Highlights From the In-Library Survey

Fifty-two persons completed the In-Library Survey. The complete In-Library Survey results are to be found in the appendices. A summary of the responses is presented here. Only the response(s) most often given by the respondents is listed.

- Frequency of Use – 43 weekly or more often.
- Services Used – 47 checked out books, 37 consulted staff
- Satisfaction Level – 47 very satisfied
- Improvements – More parking, media, books, and hours of service, in that order
- Libraries Still Be Needed Even With Computers -- 48 yes
- Rank Benefits of Snow Library Compared to Other Services – 35 at top of list
- Importance of a List of Services;
 - Programs for Children – 26 Very Important (VI)
 - Books & Other Materials – 47 VI
 - Existing Building Adequate – 21 Agree (A)
 - Importance of Out-of-Network Interlibrary Loan Service – 40 VI

- Computers and Online Services – 27 VI
- Access Library From Home/Office – 23 VI
- Meeting and Conference Rooms – 24 VI
- Group Study Rooms – 21 VI
- Materials Other Than Books – 32 VI
- Lectures, Book Discussions, Etc. – 33 VI
- Activities/Programs for Tweens/Teens – 29 VI.

Regarding the adequacy of the existing building, those who Strongly Agreed numbered eight, or 17.4 percent of the total of responses, while 10 somewhat agreed and seven disagreed.

- Importance of Snow Library Services – 50 VI
- Favor a Tax Increase to Making Direct Financial Contribution – 21 depends, 17 yes³
- Age – 35 indicated they were 65 or older, 14 stated they were in the 50 – 64 range, and there were no respondents in the 18 – 34 age bracket
- Own or Rent Current Residence – 47 own
- Ethnicity – 43 white, non-Hispanic
- Zip Code off Residence – 27 in 02653 and 11 in 02643
- Highest Level of Attained Education – 25 with a graduate college degree, six with a high school diploma, and one respondent did not complete high school
- Man or Woman – 32 females and 16 males participated.

³ The consultant has found that “depends” usually means either “depends on how much” or “depends on what will be done with the money” or both.

Highlights From the Online Survey

Forty-five persons completed the Online Survey. The complete In-Library Survey results are also found in the Appendices. What follows is a summary of the responses most frequently provided.

- Frequency of Use – 38 monthly or more often.
- Services Used – 40 checked out books, 34 checked out media, and 21 consulted staff or attended a program
- Satisfaction Level – 32 very satisfied
- Improvements – More media, more books, and “other” in that order (“Other” included open earlier, re-design of building’s interior, fiction on the main level, more Life Long Learning opportunities)
- Libraries Still Be Needed Even With Computers -- 45 yes
- Rank Benefits of Snow Library Compared to Other Services – 25 at top of list and 19 in the middle
- Importance of a List of Services;
 - Programs for Children – 19 Very Important (VI) and 12 Somewhat Important (SI)
 - Books & Other Materials – 43 VI
 - Existing Building Adequate – 17 Somewhat Agreed and 13 Agreed
 - Importance of Out-of-Network Interlibrary Loan Service – 31 VI
 - Computers and Online Services – 21 VI
 - Access Library From Home/Office – 31 VI
 - Meeting and Conference Rooms – 21 VI
 - Group Study Rooms – 20 VI and 13 SI
 - Materials Other Than Books – 24 VI and 14 SI
 - Lectures, Book Discussions, Etc. – 21 SI and 15 VI

- Activities/Programs for Tweens/Teens – 24 VI and 13 SI.

Regarding the adequacy of the existing building, those who disagreed numbered 11, or 24.4 percent of the total of responses, while four agreed (8.9%).

- Importance of Snow Library Services – 40 very important
- Number of Years Lived in Area – 15 from 10 to 19 years
- Favor a Tax Increase to Making Direct Financial Contribution – 19 yes and 19 depends
- Age – 25 were 65 or older, 13 were 50 – 64, and three were 18 – 34
- Own or Rent Current Residence – 39 own
- Ethnicity – 40 white, non-Hispanic
- Zip Code off Residence – 24 in 02653
- Highest Level of Attained Education – 23 with a graduate college degree, 13 with an undergraduate degree, and there were no respondents who indicated they had only a high school diploma or did not complete high school
- Man or Woman – 32 females and 11 males participated.

With the exception of the ranking Snow Library benefits not ranking as high as the Online Survey as in the In-Library Survey the results were quite similar.

CONCLUSIONS

Those Orleans residents and non-residents who use the Snow Library use it a great deal, and they are very complimentary – one could say fond – of the Library, the staff, and the services that are provided.

The fact that the Library has recently been ranked as one of only 10 3-star libraries in those libraries in the \$400,000 - \$999,999 expenditure range is testimony to the quality of the service provided and the reason for such a positive attitude about the Library.⁴

For many, it is probably true that any physical shortcomings of the Library are invisible because of the quality of service received. One Focus Group participant extolled the virtues of reserving books online, receiving an e-mail notification that the items were ready for pick-up, driving to the building, parking (perhaps in the short-term parking right in front), dashing in, picking up the materials, checking them out, and driving away. A very satisfied customer who does not deal with crowded shelves, noisy customers, or (apparently) inadequate parking.

Nonetheless, there were a significant number of identified weaknesses and needed improvements to clearly indicate that the status quo is unlikely to remain satisfied for an extended period of time.

⁴ Lance, Keith Curry and Ray Lyons. “America’s Star Libraries,” *Library Journal*, November 15, 2009, p. 24.