

THE COMMUNITY SPEAKS

A Summary

Over the course of the study the greater Louisville community was presented with several opportunities to share their thoughts and ideas regarding the Louisville Free Public Library (LFPL) and its future. Twenty-nine focus group discussions were held throughout the area. There were 396 public participants and 68 staff. A “web” survey was administered with over 400 persons responding. Approximately 200 persons attended six Town Hall meetings to discuss the preliminary report.

Prior to the library consultants work on the project there was a telephone survey conducted by the University of Louisville Urban Studies Institute that reached 410 persons.

THE FOCUS GROUPS

The Focus Groups were held throughout Louisville. The majority was held in the different branch libraries and the Main Library. One member of the consultant team facilitated each discussion. Representatives of Power Staffing, a Louisville-based personnel firm, took discussion notes. Power Staffing staff input their notes and provided the consultants and the Library with copies. A full set of the Focus Group notes can be read in the office of the Library Administration.

A basic set of questions were developed by the consultants, reviewed by the Library, and then used at each discussion. Because the makeup of each group was different, the number of participants different, and the specific interests of each group also different, not every group deal with every question.

The LFPL staff extended the invitations to the Focus Group participants. Following the invitations, follow-up reminders were sent. The turnout at each discussion was quite good, with most groups having between 10 and 20 participants.

Each discussion started with an introduction of the participants and the facilitator. The facilitator briefly explained the purpose of the study project. During the introductions the participants were asked to not only identify themselves by name, but also to share with the group the library they most often used and the type of use they most often pursued. This does not endeavor to summarize the introductory comments.

- What do you think is particularly good about the Library? What are its strengths?

"In Louisville, the Library seems to always be so flexible and open to change ... it is always adding programs to enhance the already wonderful lineup of activities and schedules already on tap."

The staff was almost always mentioned as one of the principal strengths of the Library, both the public service staff and the administrative staff.

The Library's Website and the ability to "order" materials online were another strength frequently mentioned.

Other positives included:

1. Availability of computers at the different buildings
 2. Internet access
 3. Computer training workshops
 4. Children's services
 5. Able to renew library materials by telephone (and the computer)
 6. Exhibits and programs at the Main Library.
- What would you say are the weaknesses of the Library?

There were four primary weaknesses stated:

1. Collections are not adequate in size and breadth
2. Computer access is often slow (response time too slow)
3. Not enough staff to provide needed services
4. Buildings are often crowded and noisy, too small.

Another frequently stated weakness was the inadequacy of the hours of service (more hours open for public use).

- Where else do you go for information? What competition does the library have?

Almost without exception the Internet and bookstores were mentioned as being the primary competition for the Library. The Internet because of accessibility; bookstores because of a wider selection and quantity of newer titles and their ambiance (found in the larger stores, such as comfortable seating, food and beverage availability, and longer hours).

- What reasons do you think people might have for not using the Library?

There were several different expressions. Those most often cited were:

- Lack of reading skills
- Lack of awareness of the full range of services available
- Lack of the buildings being inviting
- Lack of time.

There were also several that commented that they thought many people believed that libraries are intimidating.

There was widespread belief that the Library does not do enough to market its services.

- What physical changes and improvements would you like to see at the Library, both inside and outside?

"Need to keep in mind that the physical space serves more of a purpose than just a place to get books. If the Library doesn't have a good presence, it loses power."

The comments ranged from more comfortable chairs and lists of suggested reading materials to the provision of drive through service for those who want to "order" their materials online and then just drive by and pick-up the items.

Other comments included better lighting, having more library buildings, large community rooms in each facility, and improved signage and landscaping.

- Other comments regarding matters not previously covered?

Many of the comments made have been covered above. However, a few that were not mentioned during the course of the discussions included:

- The changes that have taken place throughout the Library system the past few years have been good
- Library needs to do fundraising
- Filters are negative because they limit viewing of legitimate websites
- Salaries of the Library staff are too low
- There is not enough money made available to do what needs to be done to make the Library more appealing to the public.

TOWN HALL MEETINGS

During the week of November 12, 2002, a series of five public and one staff "Town Hall" meetings were held throughout the Greater Louisville area. One meeting each was held in the Bon Air, Shawnee, Southwest, and Westport branch libraries and two meetings were held in the downtown Main Library. Approximately 200 persons attended the six meetings.

Richard Waters of PROVIDENCE *Associates Inc*, the consulting firm engaged to assess the needs of the system, presented the investigative findings and the firm's preliminary draft of recommendations for a master facilities plan. The presentation materials were subsequently made available through the Louisville Free Public Library's (LFPL) Website. A PowerPoint presentation of the Preliminary Draft of the Facilities Master Plan was made at each meeting. This is a summary of the questions, answers, and other comments made during the six meetings.¹

Craig Buthod, Director of the LFPL, opened each meeting. Mr. Buthod cited the following:

Usage of the LFPL has increased 10 percent in 2002 over the previous year.

- The greatly increased use of the library system (10% increase over 2001)
- The limitations of the physical plant, materials and staff
- The failure of the library system to meet the minimum standards set by the State of Kentucky
- The attendant failure to qualify for state funding of construction projects
- The urgent need to address these issues.

In every meeting, the increase in library usage was cited, the Coalition for Advancement of Louisville Libraries (CALL) was described and the audience was urged to promote the improvement proposal to their friends, relatives, and co-workers, and to repeatedly urge their governmental representatives to approve the proposal.

A concise summary of the questions, answers and comments from all six meetings follows. A more comprehensive summary, featuring questions, answers and comments in most of their entirety, will be in the appendix of the final report.

- Q. Why does so many of the options call for libraries to move from leased mall space to free standing buildings? Was this due to the look of the buildings or to get away from making lease payments?
- A. Some of both. If the libraries are moved to free standing buildings it will save the Louisville Free Public Library a lot of money in the long run because they will no longer have to make rent payments. It will also add to the presence of the Library to have buildings designed to be libraries, rather than a location designed for store space. The Focus Group attendees noted that the atmosphere was one of the most important features that needed to be addressed, and moving from leased property designed to be used as a strip mall to a building designed specifically as a library would definitely address that issue.

¹ No attempt has been made to reproduce the information presented by PROVIDENCE *Associates Inc* in their PowerPoint presentation. Questions and/or comments posed by those attending the meetings during the presentation and after, together with the responses from the presenter or the Director or Assistant Director of the Louisville Free Public Library, are set out in summary form.

Q. Have any sites had been chosen for the proposed new libraries?

A. No locations have been chosen yet for the new libraries. The only decisions that have been made are the general geographic areas of Greater Louisville where the different libraries will be located.

Q. Have the cost projections included library materials as well as construction costs?

A. The cost projections prepared to date include the following:

- Construction (hard construction costs)
- Furniture
- Technology
- Design fees
- Contractors' fees and overhead costs
- Owners' costs
- Contingencies.

The projections do not include the purchase of library materials or site acquisition. It is very hard to determine the cost of acquiring a new location. It could range from nothing at all to tens of thousands of dollars. Because of the large variation in pricing it was impossible to calculate how it would affect the cost projections. Therefore it has been left out of the equation at this time.

Q. Have other communities undertaken such a large project? Have other communities attempted to get such a large amount of work approved and then actually had the projects completed within a reasonable time? With Louisville/Jefferson County in the state that it is currently in, how does it compare to the other communities that have undertaken such projects?

Several other cities have undertaken projects that match or exceed what is being proposed for Louisville. These include Nashville, Jacksonville, Memphis, Denver, and Broward County, FL.

A. Various cities and/or counties have undertaken projects that either matched or exceeded that which is being recommended for the Louisville Free Public Library: Nashville, Jacksonville, Memphis, Denver, and Broward County (FL). All of these locations have been past clients of PROVIDENCE. They not only adopted the ideas presented (whether with a little modification or not) but have also been able to accomplish the improvements within a reasonable amount of time. Some communities presented the improvements to the voters, e.g. Jacksonville and Denver, and the governing bodies, e.g. Memphis and Nashville, approved others.

- Q. Have sources of private funding been explored?
- A. Some private funding is certainly a possibility but specific amounts or sources have not been explored pending finalization of the proposal.
- Q. How would these improvements be funded?
- A. There are a variety of ways. One might be a library tax. One could be a dedicated sales tax and bonds could be issued. This is a question to be answered by the incoming Metro government.
- Q. Who will make the local funding decision?
- A. It could be done through the fiscal court or through a ballot referendum. (Several people stated they would much prefer NOT to see a ballot on the issue because there was historical precedence to indicate it would be defeated and they believed the voter climate has not changed enough to ensure approval.)
- Q. Why would we need a greatly expanded downtown library with a number of branch libraries rather than a system of several satellite regional facilities?
- A. A large main library is essential because it serves as a research center and because it houses unique items that may not be available elsewhere. It also has more amenities such as large meeting rooms or an auditorium. It also houses the basic administrative and support staff. An arrangement of satellite regional libraries would be less expensive to operate but is not practicable because of the limitations of mass transit. Such libraries would be heavily dependent on users with their own vehicles and those who did not would be disadvantaged.

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- Q. Why would you recommend tearing down the North building at the Main Library? Why is this even a consideration?
- A. It does not provide enough space to meet the requirements and is architecturally and aesthetically at wide variance with the South building, which is a historic site.
- Q. Why are you recommending new construction when there are existing Carnegie library buildings in the Smoketown area that were closed several years ago due to budget constraints and which could be renovated and re-opened to provide badly needed library access to that community? If there is enough money to build new libraries there should be enough to renovate these buildings in black neighborhoods.

A. It is our belief that buildings of that age and that have deteriorated and/or been adapted for other use are not appropriate for enhancement and that such an effort would not be cost effective.

Q. How was the study funded?

A. Through city/county funds. How the expansion would be funded is the \$64,000 question. It could be through a variety of sources but would have to go through the legislative process and the majority of funding would have to come from allocations made by the incoming government.

Q. With respect to the totally new building, did you hear from any of the handicapped users about creating an access off Broadway?

A. No, but any design would be totally ADA accessible, with electronic doors, lever door handles, no ramps at all, entrance from street level, elevators, wide stack aisles – everything that could possibly be done to make it accessible not only to handicapped users but someone pushing a baby stroller, for instance.

Q. Would you have a children's area and would you put more computers in that space?

A. Look at this proposed regional library plan. The children's area is larger than all but two of your current branch libraries and there is a 20-station computer lab.

Q. Will the City be in a position to issue bonds on this?

A. Most library funding in Kentucky comes through a library district. Such a district could be established through a referendum or by action of the local legislative body.

Q. Would it be less expensive to lease more space in the Highlands-Shelby Park facility?

A. Yes, in the short term, it would. But after 20 years all you have are rental receipts and those receipts could go toward a new building. We strongly recommend getting out of the rental business and building standalone, library-purpose buildings. The Highlands-Shelby Park site has great parking and we recommend a new facility at that location.

Q. What happens when you open the doors to the new library?

When a new library is open, replacing an existing facility, usage increases by as much as 50 percent.

A. Usage increases by 50 percent - sometimes even 100 percent. And that is not a one-time phenomenon. It goes up even further in subsequent years.

- Q. Does your proposal anticipate meeting the library needs for the next 20 years?
- A. Yes. And typically, the facilities last for 40 – 50 years. The proposal calls for three entirely new libraries, renovation to varying degrees or building new structures to house existing facilities, plus bookmobiles.
- Q. Is it possible that if one of these options is selected and approved – facilities expended, enhanced and new sites acquired – that by the time all that is completed the system will again be inadequate?
- A. Our projections actually are figured for 20 years even though we are using 2007 population figures. We are confident that if one of these proposed options is implemented, the resulting system will accommodate usage for 20 years.

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- Q. Are these proposals designed to simply meet the standard requirements or will they exceed those requirements?
- A. They are configured to exceed the minimum standards.
- Q. Do you have to keep the historic (South) building portion of the Main Library even if it is not susceptible to that use?
- A. That building is an historic site and it should remain no matter what is done to the library complex.
- Q. Where would you be able to put a library that size (Southwest Regional)? I was on the Commission when we opened this library and even then we were very limited as to where we could locate a facility of this size. We felt this was a desirable place for our library and it was designed to serve Fairdale, Valley Station and Pleasure Ridge Park at the time it was opened.
- A. I can answer part of your question in this context. Our recommendation to all of our clients is that when you go out looking for land, is that there is a 4 to 1 ratio in order to accommodate the building footprint, parking, setbacks, landscaping and things of that nature.

- C. My concern is that we have a lot of traffic here from Valley High School. Those kids walk here and then walk home. I know we don't have good transportation here, but that's how serious they are about using this library. If you put it down the street, they'd have to walk a lot further and then go in another direction home. So I would like to keep the library on Dixie Highway if at all possible.
- A. The decision about where to put the library is often the most difficult part of the process, more difficult than how to pay for it or what to put in it. At this stage it's extremely important, when you have no money, that you don't become concerned about where. Get your money and then be concerned about location. This plan will affect all of Greater Louisville. Every location would be either improved or re-located, so it's not just about one site. One of the next steps that would take place in this process would be a site study and that's the time to talk about specific property.
- Q. Does that \$40 figure (projected per capita per year for proposed library improvements) include what we're already paying?
- A. Yes – you're already paying more than half, so the increase would be slightly less than \$20 per person per year.
- Q. Do you think Louisville can really develop a showcase library system?
- A. You know your city better than I do. However, I can only refer you to what has been done in other places all over the country. It's been done spectacularly well in Jacksonville, Memphis, and Nashville. There is no reason it could not be done here. It will just take a concerted, concentrated effort on the part of everyone who wants to see this kind of improvement in the system.

THE WEB SURVEY

The primary objective of the web survey was to afford an opportunity for those persons who had a home or office computer with Internet connectivity to access the Library's website and participate in a survey designed to obtain the participant's opinions regarding LFPL services. Persons could also access and complete the survey from a Library computer.

The survey contained 14 questions. Most of those persons who elected to respond completed most of the questions. A summary of the responses, question by question, follows.

- Frequency of access to the Library via computer over the past year?

Two out of three web survey participants indicated they accessed the Library by computer at least monthly.

Two or more times a week was most often the response, 117 such responses. Two out of three participants indicated they accessed the LFPL by computer at least once a month.

- Services used when accessing via computer?

Over 40 percent (43.4) responded that they checked the Library's computerized catalog. The second most used activity was to renew library materials and activity three in terms of frequency of use was to reserve an item via the computer.

- Degree of satisfaction with electronic access to the LFPL?

Almost seven in ten respondents indicated they were very satisfied.

- Desired improvements regarding electronic access to the Library?

This was an open-ended question. There were hundreds of comments received. The most frequently mentioned improvement was an easier to use electronic catalog.

- In-person use of the Library?

Only four percent of those surveyed indicated they limited their use of the Library to electronic use.

Only 15 of the more than 400 respondents indicated that they "only visit electronically."

- Frequency of in-person use?

The most often checked response was more than 10 times, so indicated by 61.3 percent of those responding.

- Desired electronic improvements within the Library buildings?

The most requested improvement was for more terminals for public use, followed by full integration and faster response time.

- Services and improvements and their importance?

Story hours and other programs for children, very important according to 42.3 percent of the responses and not important according to 23.5 percent of those responding.

Provision of books and other materials, 97.0 percent indicated very important.

Building new Library facilities, 24.0 percent said very important while 33.2 percent said somewhat important.

Almost six of 10 persons believe that building new Library facilities is either very or somewhat important.

Provision of computers and online services, very or somewhat important checked by 55.0 percent of those participating in the survey.

Access to Library information from home and office computers, 80.4 percent marked this was very important and another 12.7 percent said somewhat important.

Provision of meeting and conference rooms for groups and activities, 31.6 percent indicated somewhat important and 24.3 percent indicated slightly important.

Provision of special equipment for the visually and hearing impaired, three out of four marked very or somewhat important.

Provision of assistance in locating books and specific information, nine of 10 survey responses indicated this was very or somewhat important.

Provision of media, such as DVDs, videocassettes, CDs, e-books, and computer-assisted information, 55.2 percent stated this was very important and 29.6 percent stated this was somewhat important.

Provision of lectures, book discussions, exhibits, and other programs, 28.8 percent said very important and 33.8 percent said somewhat important.

- Number of years lived in the greater Louisville area?

Average number of years was 24.6.

- Age of survey participants?

Between ages of 12 – 24, 8.7 percent.

Between ages of 25 – 34, 22.0 percent.

Between ages of 35 – 49, 41.0 percent.

Between ages of 50 – 64, 23.3 percent.

Age 65 plus, 5.1 percent.

- Ethnicity of survey participants?

White, non-Hispanic, 86.9 percent.

Black or African-American, 5.1 percent.

Hispanic, 1.4 percent.

Asian or Asian-American, 3.1 percent.

- Zip code of current place of residence?

There were 54 different zip codes indicated. The highest number of responses was zip code 40206, with 37 persons indicating that was the zip code of their current place of residence. The second highest was 40207, with 27 indications. Other double-digit responses were:

40205 – 25	40217 - 16
40220 – 22	40204 - 15
40222 – 21	40291 - 13
40299 – 20	40223 - 12
40241 – 18	40208 - 12
40214 – 17	40243 - 11
40218 – 17	40215 - 10

- Highest level of educational attainment?

Persons with a graduate college degree accounted for 35.2 percent of those responding followed by persons with an undergraduate degree accounting for 28.3 percent. Persons with some college accounted for 16.1 percent of the survey participants.

- Gender of survey participants?

Over 70 percent (71.8) of those responding were females.

ANOTHER SURVEY

In late August of last year the University of Louisville Urban Studies Institute conducted a telephone interview with 410 adults throughout greater Louisville. The survey, commissioned by a committee comprised of members of the Library Foundation, Library Advisory Board, and Friends of the Louisville Free Public Library, had an accuracy of plus or minus four percent.²

A few of the highlights of that survey appear to have been borne out by those who participated in the Web Survey. For instance:

According to the telephone survey administered last year 96 percent of those participating said the Library was very important to the community.

- Importance of Library to the community – 96 percent indicated it was very important

² This means that if every adult in greater Louisville had been contacted the results would be with four percentage points of the results of those 410 persons who were contacted and participated.

- Services indicated to be very important – 84 percent indicated technology to help the visually and physically impaired, 78 percent said add more books and media, and 76 percent indicated new services for children and teens.

The full results of the telephone survey are available in the office of the Library Director.