Watchung Library

Building Community

Building A Future

Report and recommendations of a subcommittee of the Watchung Library Advisory Board

Watchung Library will be the local resource to educate the mind, elevate the cultural consciousness and enhance the quality of life of every resident in our borough. It will be a much-needed community hub in which to meet and collaborate with neighbors, to use technology and materials beyond what is available at home, and to enjoy the 'library as experience'– the third place in the community that is neither home nor workplace, that rounds out a fuller community life. The library can strengthen and broaden the literacy skills of students in our schools, offer continuing education for all, and act as a resource for small business and remote workers.

The library will function best in the future if its design is open to flexibility and to adapting as needs change. To maximize efficiency, spaces can do double or triple duty, serving multiple purposes at various times, with ease in repurposing in the future. Flexible spaces can be easily transformed to better meet emerging needs.

Essential elements of a library – the basics:

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* **Bookshelves**: stacks for books, CDs, DVDs, video games, etc., plus a browsing area for new materials, styled as a bookstore, with books attractively arranged with covers facing out

* **Periodicals** – newspaper and magazine collections and reading areas furnished with comfortable seating

* **Meeting spaces/conference rooms** for collaborative projects and meetings (8-12 people), with screen wall/projection capabilities for presentations. Small group/quiet study spaces for student groups/tutors (2-3 to 4-6 person groups), with interior-facing walls comprised of glass for visibility and openness

* **Circulation and reference desks** can be scaled down if used in more technology-supported ways, such as self-checkout and mobile reference help

* **Children's library** featuring reading nooks and story time space, educational playspace, geared toward literacy program support

* **Computer/tech access** – public computers with internet access and database resources; an abundance of outlets for charging devices

(Shutterstock)

* **Staff work room designed around unique local functions –** Watchung Library receives daily deliveries of materials from other branches for patrons, and these materials are also returned to Watchung to go back to other branches. Currently there is no space for sorting and processing those items. Staff work space should be away from public access, and adjacent to a separate exterior door to streamline daily deliveries.

* **Staff offices/break room**

* **Storage space**

* **Water fountains**

* **Bathrooms with infant changing tables**

* **Mechanical systems space** (utilities/hvac/water heater/routers etc.)

Expanding the use of our library:

The emphasis of a forward-looking library should be on on *people* more than on collections.

Meeting/performing arts space (with adjacent bathrooms) that can be used during and after hours. Seating capacity for 100 people (800 square feet for seating plus appropriate staging area for performers/speakers) would serve multiple uses for the borough: public meetings; group meetings for scouts, seniors, library activities, cultural events and music

Magician shows fun with reading at Watchung Library

performances such as those sponsored by the Friends of the Watchung Library and the Watchung Arts Center; hosting school groups for technology and other projects; adult education programs and enrichment such as workshops, yoga, and dance; small business needs; and as a warming station in times of emergency. This space could be available for the community, by reservation, and for rental by private groups.

Long Hill Library allows after-hours access to meeting rooms using a common entrance corridor.

The design should be such that the library materials collection can be closed off and locked during after-hours events, while still allowing access to the larger meeting space and bathrooms. A tech lab/makerspace could be integrated in such a space, behind a locked partition or doors, so it could be closed off when not in use, but also employ the larger space for projects. This meeting space should have kitchen facilities–useful for meetings, crafts, and warming station purposes, and be equipped with AV/projection capabilities and a sound system for meeting use, and assistive listening devices for people with hearing difficulties.

Small group or individual study spaces for quiet study/tutoring groups: There is demand for tutoring space during after-school hours. There are currently not enough tutoring spaces available for those who want to use them.

Display space for art installations (rotating displays of art or collections from the community, with locking cabinets as appropriate). Changing displays of art could occupy empty wall space in hallways and throughout the library; libraries use this space to host art sales from the community. Watchung could also have the opportunity to create a space for the 'Legend of Watchung' mural, preserved by the historical commission.

Chester Library has art wall galleries, offering local artists a venue to exhibit pieces for sale.

Open lounge area, a community living room, with comfortable lounge chairs and welcoming furnishings, with a gas fireplace, for reading, game-playing, puzzle activities. This can house the periodicals collection (newspapers and magazines). Throughout the building, intimate quiet areas for reading and study should be interspersed with more open community gathering spaces with higher ceilings.

Chester Library features a gathering space around a fireplace, with patio seating right outside.

Relax and read by the fireplace at Clarence Dillon Library, Bedminster

Technology Center including possibilities for robotics projects, STEM workstations, backdrops/screens for videography, a computer with video editing software, 3D printer – exact forward-looking technology should be determined with advice from tech experts.

Teen lounge gathering space with lounge and laptop chairs and group work areas for homework collaboration, plus charging stations.

Outdoor Spaces can include benches, tables, sculpture, gardens, wooded garden paths, a gathering space for borough events (amphitheater/concert area) and nature-based educational activities for children, such as children's garden and creative play area.

A central courtyard brings the outside in at Bernardsville Library

Current Space

The current library has not been updated or improved since it was put into public use (from former single-family residential use) in the 1970's. Usable space in the building is about 6,036 square feet. [The entire building is about 8,712 square feet.] Please see **Appendix A** for a detailed evaluation and floor plan of the space as currently allocated. The building's major deficiencies are many, and are also listed there, include structural, non-ADA-compliant, and maintenance-related issues. The fact that the building was a converted single-family home means that it was never designed to function as a public building, much less meet the burgeoning demands of a modern library.

The projected population of Watchung must be considered in planning borough buildings. Typically library design looks forward twenty years for population trends. The population of Watchung has increased about 26% since the current building was first put into use as a library. Greater growth of the borough is surely ahead, with new residential developments already in the planning stages.

Neighboring towns are in the process of improving their libraries to offer more to their residents. See **Appendix B** for examples of the projects our neighbors have underway for their towns.

Design Considerations and Features of a Modern Public Library

Ideally, a modern library works best if all facilities are on one level. When the design must go vertical, as in the current multi-floor building, much space is lost (and expense given over) to elevators and stairwells. Library architect Anthony Iovino estimated that elevators and stairwells in a building similar to the current library would take up 1,500 square feet of the designed space. **Single-story** libraries are much more flexible in potential allocation of space for the future, and can be staffed more efficiently. When the site permits, single-story libraries offer the greatest efficiency of space and the most flexibility for future use.

As technology changes, chargers and connections evolve. However one constant that has remained is technology's dependence on simple **electrical outlets**. Outlets should be incorporated into work tables, carrels, and lounge areas wherever possible to anticipate expanding need. Convenient outlets reduce hazards from wires strung across walking paths and allow patrons to work wherever they like.

Old-style library computer carrels are restrictive, inflexible, and take up a great deal of space; they are useful for only one single patron at a time and for only one purpose. They interfere with sight lines and interrupt the visual flow of the space. **Laptops** are now preferred over desktop computers for public use in libraries: Laptops can be used at any table, in private study areas, in group study areas, and in lounge chairs. Patrons have the option of finding the privacy they may need to work on quiet projects, or take the laptop into a group study room to collaborate with others. More laptops and fewer desktop computer workstations should be considered as part of the building design. Whether patrons bring their own devices or use library computers, they will need a robust internet connection, Wi-Fi, and an abundance of electrical outlets for charging.

A vending machine at Woburn Library dispenses laptops

(Shutterstock)

Reference services need no longer be tied to a bulky reference desk stocked with volumes of books. Reference librarians can now be more mobile as they serve patrons. **Staff desks** can be appropriately scaled down in public spaces, while still allowing the reference staff to be accessible to the public at the point of contact, with Wi-Fi enabled devices.

Self-checkout stations may be installed for patron materials borrowing, eliminating the need for a large circulation desk. Staff can still assist at the self-checkout station when needed.

Cafe offerings can be brought into libraries in various ways: vending machines, simple coffee machines with self-pay readers or coin collectors, or even just a policy shift that patrons are welcome to bring their own hot drink cups provided they have secure lids. In a caffeine-fueled world, this makes the library a more hospitable place that encourages longer visits, reading, socializing and working in the library. Many modern libraries acknowledge some form of hot beverage provision.

Self-serve coffee/snacks at the Y

Expansive **windows** supplement light and bring the natural landscape into the library, a view and atmosphere that changes with the seasons. Large windows take advantage of the beautiful Watchung setting and add restorative tranquility and the illusion of more space. Window walls from corridors into study and meeting rooms expand their usefulness, as they become more appropriate for tutoring groups and lighten the space, while allowing sight lines for library staff.

Stacks at Oakland Library are on rolling casters

Ways to incorporate essential flexibility:

- Rolling stacks that can be moved to make way for a performance venue or other large-space meeting use
- Moveable partitions to subdivide larger spaces
- Spaces serving multiple purposes, such as the meeting space serving as a technology lab.

Desired Sustainability Components: Daylight can be maximized within the building with generous windows, coated on southern exposures; solar panels can reduce energy costs; Green Team members can be consulted for input on adding green elements such as rainwater collection barrels for gardens; LEED certification could be considered. Some of these options may open up possibilities for additional grant funding. Noise control and acoustical management should be incorporated in the design.

Greater functionality afforded by the new space: expansion of Watchung Library's service to the community.

With full accessibility and more functional community space, Watchung can bring to the community a greater breadth of activities: homework help and educational support; public performances by musicians and other performing artists; lectures and workshops for learning new skills; activities like yoga, meditation and exercise; game nights, movie nights, teen activities, dance events, lectures, crafts activities, virtual and augmented reality projects and video production. An improved library in Watchung will add value to our borough and provide space for research, reading and study as well as collaboration and cultural enrichment. The library can be the heart and soul of our borough, enhancing the quality of life for every member of our community.

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The Subcommittee of the Watchung Library Advisory Board, 4/2/19

Tamara Benc, Margaret Ellis, Amy Fiorilla

For further reading:

“Once quaint, the Albert Wisner Public Library galvanized support for a new library that narrows the digital divide and powers a roster of nonstop programs.” (Warwick, NY, named Best Small Library in America by Library Journal)
https://www.libraryjournal.com/?detailStory=culture-convener-best-small-library-in-america-2016

Survey results from SCLS community survey 2018:
https://s40873y1pyb1ozqsg275sisu-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Community-Survey-Report.pdf

“Not Your Mother’s Library: Building Community Library Spaces for the 21st Century,” *The Atlantic,* Oct. 6, 2014. https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/10/not-your-mothers-library/381119/

“Makerspaces: ...in public libraries provide places to invent, to create, and utilize technology.” Ideas and inspiration about equipping makerspaces in public libraries:
https://ideas.demco.com/tag/public-library-makerspaces/

Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life, by Eric Klinenberg, Broadway Books, 2019. “Eric Klinenberg believes that the future of democratic societies rests not simply on shared values but on shared spaces: the libraries, childcare centers, bookstores, churches, synagogues, and parks where crucial, sometimes life-saving connections, are formed. These are places where people gather and linger, making friends across group lines and strengthening the entire community.” (from SCLS holdings site)

Oakland, NJ had a long struggle to modernize and expand a library adequate for residents. The end result is stunning and incorporates multiple uses for the flexible spaces.
https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/bergen/oakland/2018/10/10/oakland-nj-library-renovation-complete/1488914002/

Keeping the Public Informed: Construction Updates

The Save Watchung Library website is being transformed into a resource of ideas for public inspiration, enthusiasm, and imagination for the upcoming library project.

www.SaveWatchungLibrary.com

Berkeley Heights posts regular weekly updates on the construction progress of their municipal complex, which includes their new town library. Watchung might want to consider similar posting on the borough site, to keep the public engaged, enthused and informed about the pending library project.

https://www.berkeleyheights.gov/Archive.aspx?AMID=45

Berkeley Heights Municipal Complex

Construction Forecast

March 25, 2019 – April 5, 2019

Activity	Noise	Dust	Vibration	Odor	Affected Areas	3/23 Sat	3/24 Sun	3/25 Mon	3/26 Tue	3/27 Wed	3/28 Thu	3/29 Fri	3/30 Sat	3/31 Sun	4/1 Mon	4/2 Tue	4/3 Wed	4/4 Thu	4/5 Fri
Footings/Foundations					New Municipal Building			X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
Basement Excavation					New Municipal Building				X			X			X	X			
Hydrocarbon Removal					New Municipal Building				X										
Interior Backfill & Grading					New Municipal Building												X	X	X

LEGEND: HIGH MODERATE LOW

Note: Weather permitting/schedule is subject to change.

PHOTOS FROM THE PREVIOUS WEEK:

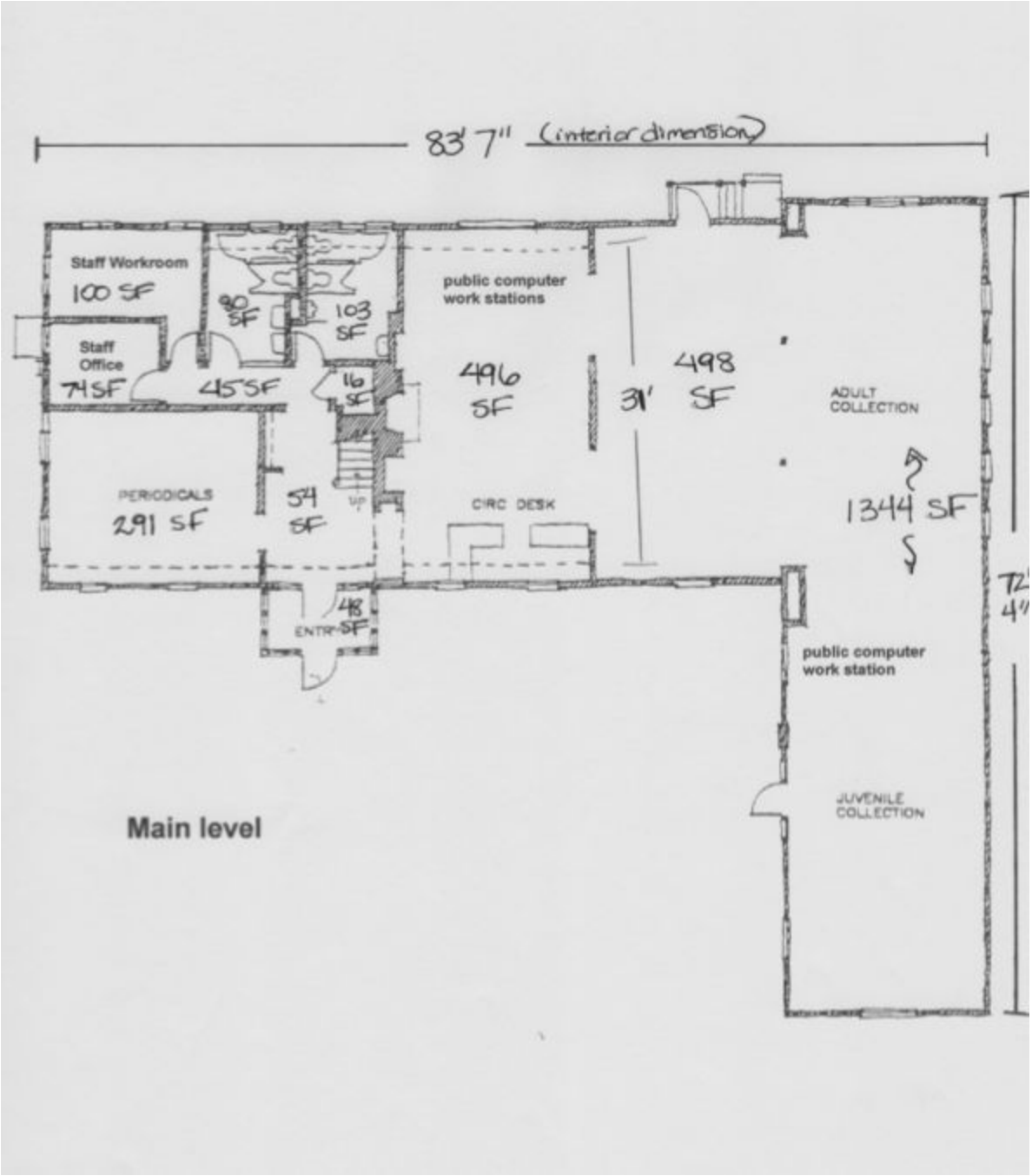
Foundation walls complete at southeast corner

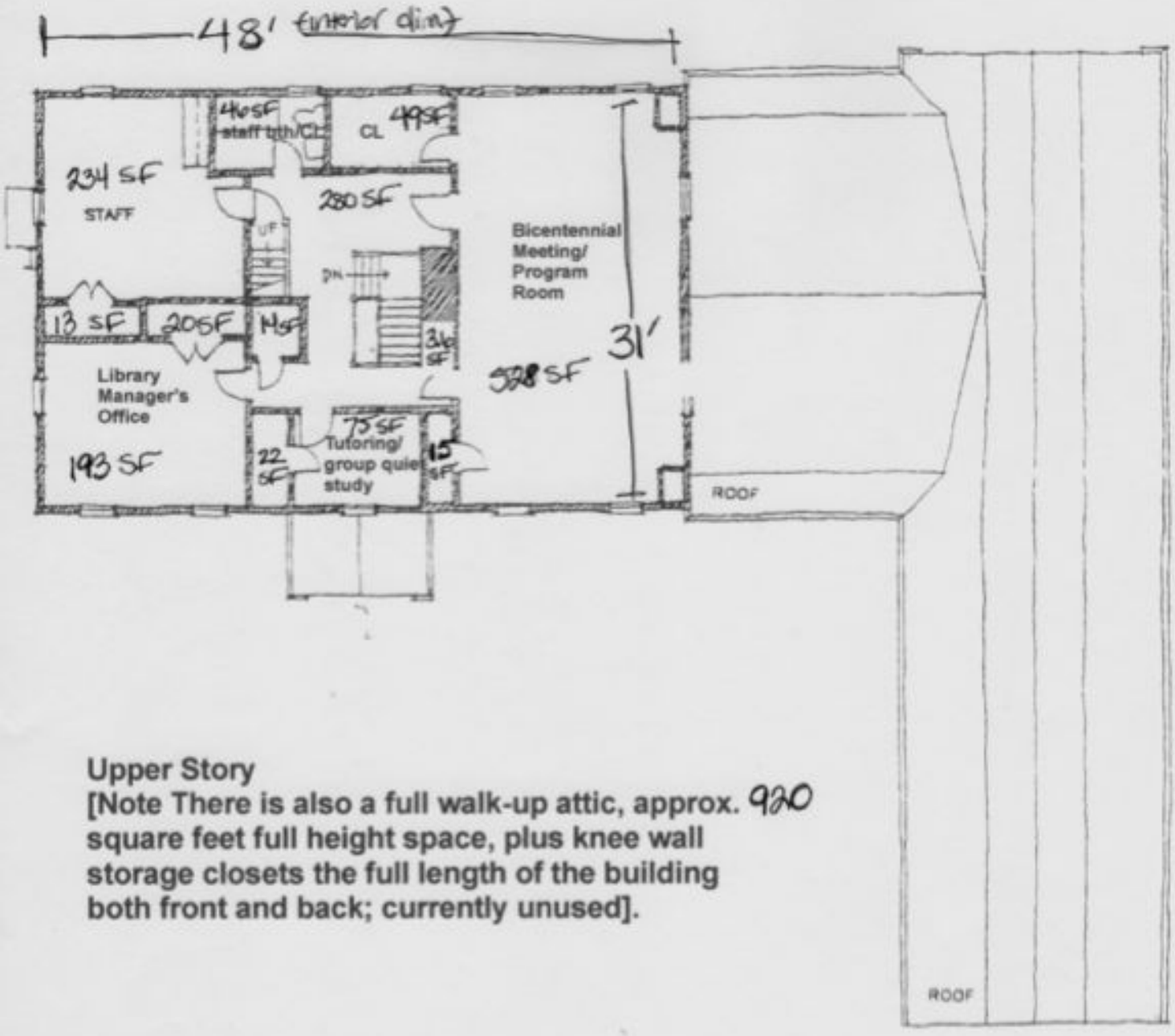
Form work for foundation walls at main entrance

Rebar and form work for south foundation wall, center sector

Form work stripped at north foundation walls

APPENDIX A - current library floor plan

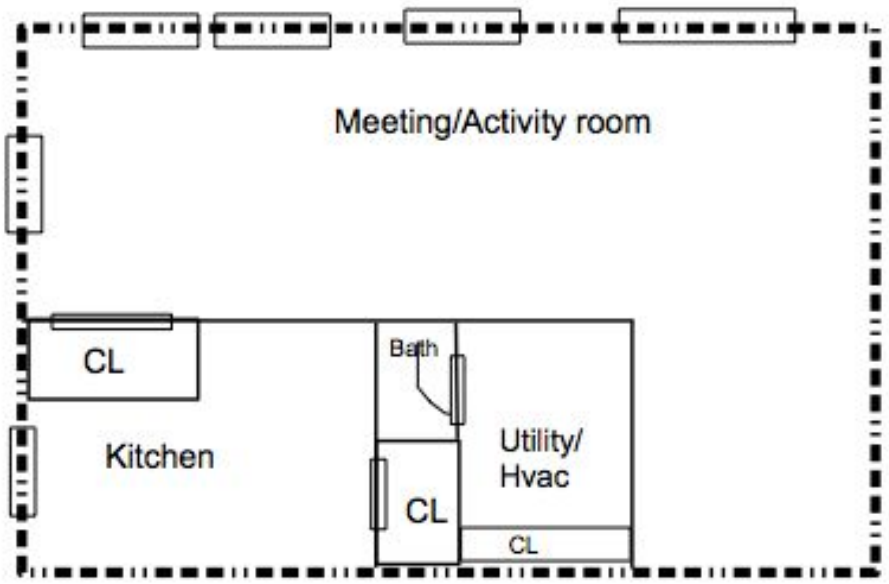




Upper Story
[Note There is also a full walk-up attic, approx. 920 square feet full height space, plus knee wall storage closets the full length of the building both front and back; currently unused].

Basement

(no interior stair access)



All measurements are approximate.

Total square footage as allocated:	
collections (including circ desk)	2629 SF
community space - lower level (exterior entrance only)	1262 SF
(includes 55 SF closets, 16 SF bath, 214 SF disused kitchen)	
staff/offices/workroom	601 SF
meeting space (bicentennial room)	528 SF
misc. access —stairs, hallways, entry	427 SF
bathrooms (main and upper levels)	229 SF
closets (main and upper levels)	153 SF
utilities (basement area)	132 SF
small group study	75 SF
Attic space (920 SF, currently unused)	0 SF
Total usable space:	6036 SF

Note that the current building has no interior access from the main level to the lower level, and no elevator access between the three levels. Any improvements or replacement space would need additional square footage to accommodate ADA requirements.

Note that the square footage alone does not fully describe the utility of the current building. It remains out of ADA compliance, and the public meeting spaces are not accessible to anyone with a mobility impairment. There is no interior access at all to the lower level, and exterior entrance from the main parking lot entails using a steep set of concrete steps.

The windows are drafty and leaky, the HVAC system is unreliable, and assessments of the structural support throughout the building have led to questions about its stability for use as a public space.

Appendix B

Library Plans in Neighboring Towns

Scotch Plains is in the process of building a new 30,000 square foot library building, scheduled to break ground in June of 2019. (scroll down near bottom of page at this link). The current building, built in 1967 is 14,000 square feet in size.

https://www.libraryjournal.com/?detailStory=LJNov15DesignInstitutesChallenges

Berkeley Heights has begun construction on a municipal complex, which will include a library of nearly 13,000 square feet, plus additional community all-purpose rooms exceeding another 3,600 square feet. (see floor plans page 40-42 at this link)

https://www.berkeleyheights.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2133/Municipal-Complex-Redevelopment-Plan-PDF

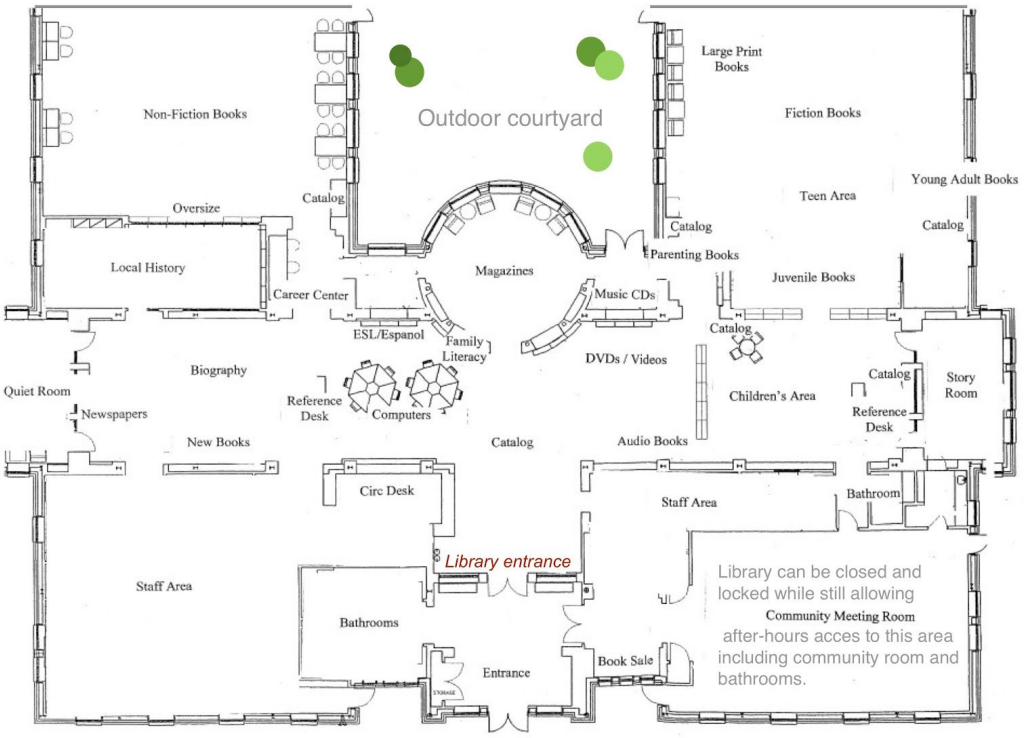
Long Hill enjoys a newer, modern 15,000 square-foot library incorporating many ideas that would serve well in Watchung–ample exterior-access meeting spaces for during and after-hours uses, small group study rooms, and defined children's library with programming room. Tall ceilings and large windows allow attractive views and interior natural light. When subcommittee members asked Long Hill librarians what they would do differently in the space, they said that the bank of desktop computers take up a lot of space and limit users' flexibility using library computers. They also said that the noise control could be better. The high ceilings, hard surfaces, and open floor plan are inviting and attractive but could benefit from some acoustic management to control noise. Other similarly designed libraries mitigate noise travel in creative ways with acoustical materials, such as wooden slats (Walnut Creek Library in California, for instance) or strategically placed acoustical tiles. The Long Hill Library is a wonderful model of what Watchung could be, and offers ideas that can be scaled and modified to fit Watchung's design.

Warren already has modern library space of about 22,000 square feet, and is currently working on an outdoor amphitheater to add another dimension to library use.

North Plainfield Library is a 11,000-square-feet. The town plans to make some building upgrades in the near future.

Bernardsville, another small town in Somerset County, is home to a well-designed and very functional town library. The library proper can be locked while still allowing access to the community space, allowing for multiple uses. This is a very common element of modern library design, and desirable for the flexibility it offers, making public space available to the entire community. Its community room is available for rent.

Bernardsville library map



Gallery

Ideas and innovations for efficiencies and design in public libraries

Long Hill's meeting room has walls of closets to maintain access to materials.

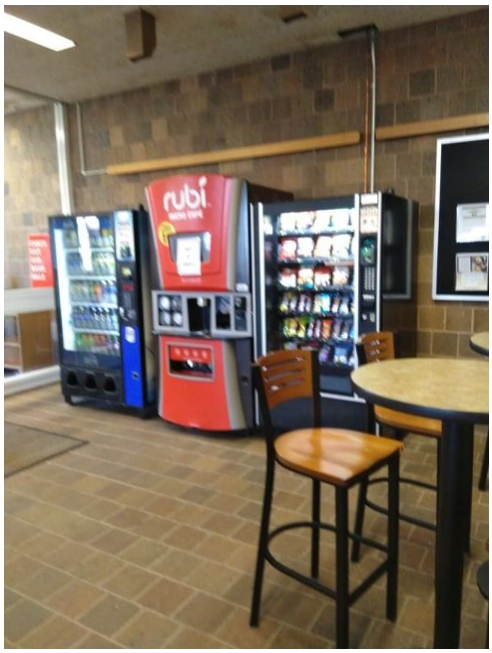
Oakland Library has a quiet reading room with lounge chairs and fireplace.

Children's Room features at the Long Hill Library

San Jose Library uses egg chairs to create secluded reading nooks

Walnut Creek Library has
Laptop-friendly lounge chairs

Patio cafe at
Coronado Library
in California



Vending Cafe at Manville Library

Walnut Creek Library offers self-checkout stations

Woburn Library's redesign features high open spaces as well as smaller reading areas

Quiet study rooms at Long Hill Library offer space for tutoring and for students to work together

Wooden slats line the ceiling of the Walnut Creek Library in California, proving that acoustics can be managed in unique ways that enhance aesthetic design, whether on a grand scale or in a smaller design.

Oakland Library (NJ) created a space to showcase their local historical mural, reminiscent of Watchung's own 'Legend of Watchung' mural, preserved through popular support. A new library in Watchung could reserve wall space to bring home our own mural to the appropriate local location, accompanied by an explanation of the history of the piece.

Piano and furniture on casters allows this space to easily transform from library to performance venue.

Rvsd 4/9/19