

FACILITIES ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

This document is a summary of the major conclusions and recommendations prepared by Charles W. Robinson in his general overview of conditions in each branch library in comparison with the service goals and priorities established in the long range planning process. Particular attention was given during his visits to the preparedness of the facilities to fulfill the service priorities selected by the Community Advisory Planning Committee, most especially Current Topics and Titles, Lifelong Learning and Information Literacy. The complete assessment report also includes comments about each branch library. Those comments are not provided in this summary.

FINDINGS

General

1. The branch facilities of the Fort Worth Public Library fall into three general square-foot sizes: small (2,000-5,600), medium (7,700-11,000), and large (25,000). They reflect the architecture of the era in which they were built
2. All of them are physically well maintained, unusual for municipal buildings.
3. The average building age is younger than in many in the cities and towns of the nation.
4. All branch facilities seem to have adequate parking for the use that they now receive.
5. The exterior signage is adequate
6. All but BOLD and COOL, special purpose facilities, seem to have easy access from main streets.
7. All facilities, except the two regional libraries, are very seriously short of space for behind-the-scenes activities, with small workrooms and staff rooms. Office space for the staff to do essential tasks such as collection maintenance is almost non-existent.
8. Most of the facilities have no meeting rooms, severely limiting programming for children and teens
9. There are no computer labs or dedicated areas such as the one in the central library.

Current Topics and Titles

1. Multiple copies of high-demand print and non-print materials are almost non-existent in Fort Worth libraries. The choice, historically, has been made in favor of numbers of titles over multiple copies of high-demand materials.
2. There is no significant merchandising of new/popular materials in any branch library facility in Fort Worth.
3. There is no furniture or fixtures in any of the libraries to make merchandising easy.
4. Present shelving, generally, is not used for merchandising materials, except for slight attempts in children's areas. Because of the use of storage shelving in the stacks and the often-crowded shelves, there is little opportunity for face-out display of materials in the largest part of the collection.
5. There is no evidence of remodeling or expansion to accommodate PC-based services and equipment.
6. DVDs, now a major format, are not apparent in the collections.
7. Branches have little or no room for comfortable reading/listening areas, except in the regional libraries.
8. There are no preview stations for videos, DVDs and CDs.

Lifelong Learning

1. Signage in the facilities is almost, but not quite, nonexistent.
2. Most existing signage has been created by staff on-site without proper sign-making tools or materials.
3. Customers entering a branch cannot easily determine from signs where materials are located.
4. The ends of the stacks, if they are labeled at all, generally have only the Dewey numerical ranges on them, difficult for readers to understand.
5. Signage is not used within the shelving ranges, at right angles to the face of the shelving. This practice, frequent in many libraries and in bookstores, gives a useful guide to subject areas for those seeking access to a particular area.
6. A full range of program events is nearly impossible in most branches because of their size and the almost total lack of meeting rooms.

7. Centralized selection of most branch materials, an efficient and effective practice in many libraries, has been implemented by FWPL.
8. An insufficient amount of staff resources is allocated to centralized selection of branch materials, resulting in reduced and delayed availability of materials for the public.
9. Lack of meeting room space inhibits programming for preschool children.

Information Literacy

1. There are no computer labs in any of the branches.
2. There are no preview stations for videos, DVDs and CDs.
3. There appeared to be sufficient numbers of public access computers in most branches for the amount of use observed during the site visits.

Local History and Genealogy

1. This service priority is not significantly addressed in any of the 14 branches, except for duplicate copies of a few highly used items. (The service priority is addressed primarily through the Central Library.)

Cultural Awareness

1. Languages other than English, such as Spanish, are not evident in the Library's catalog and on its web site's home page.
2. Community languages are not evident in Library brochures and other promotional materials.
3. With only four meeting rooms in the 14 branches, it will be difficult to fulfill the goal of programming associated with this service response.

General Information

1. It appears that the onsite printed reference materials are less and less used in the branches.
2. Hard copy reference collections in the branches may be too large for the use they receive.
3. Most branches have reference desks, but generally do not have effective signage to identify them for customers.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Merchandising

When one observes the present appearance of the FWPL branches, there is every reason to believe that the quickest and most effective way to further most of the goals listed under Current Topics and Titles and Lifelong Learning is by putting in place a program of effective merchandising of materials. This program has several parts.

1. Purchase and install display fixtures for every full-service branch, not only for new book displays of current fiction, non-fiction and other popular materials, but also of older titles.
 - It is essential that a modest number of the lower type be immediately purchased and installed in all branches in order to display the collection and attract use.
 - Replace existing shelving with display shelving. Even with a reduction in collection size, the annual turnover of the remaining collection would at least double, it is estimated.
2. Library staff should receive training in merchandising techniques.
3. Assign merchandising responsibility to at least one person in each branch.

Signage

The present almost complete lack of signage in the interior of the branches seriously inhibits a user from either finding a particular subject or title or running across some book or video or children's book which attracts instant interest.

1. A systemwide policy should be adopted for many types of interior signage.
2. Signage should lead from the general to the specific, and should be attractively done, often with one coherent theme throughout the building.
3. Signage should be easily changed and updated as conditions warrant.
4. There are very few signs in Spanish or other community languages in those branches that serve a significant number of people speaking languages other than English. At least in some branches, signs in two languages might be needed.

5. All displays of materials, whether permanent or temporary in nature, should have their own signs to indicate the content of the display. This is an essential part of merchandising.
6. There should be much more signage in the stack areas, not only on the end panels but indicating where specific subjects can be found by using signs at right angles to the face of the shelves.
7. The most cost-effective method of creating signage is centrally, with requests by branches rapidly fulfilled. Staff charged with this responsibility should periodically look at each branch from a total signage point of view, updating and replacing as necessary. They can also bring new ideas for signage to the branches.
8. Centrally-produced signs and displays should also be produced for programs such as the summer reading club, observances such as African American History Week, and the like.

Computers

1. Space for public access computers should be added to branches if/when the facilities are expanded.
2. Computer laboratories should be added to branches if/when the facilities are expanded.

Meeting Rooms

1. Meeting rooms should be added to branches if/when the facilities are expanded.

Staff Work Areas

1. Adequate work space for behind-the-scenes activities should be added to branches if/when the facilities are expanded.

Materials Selection

The collection of materials in any library represents the core of its use by the public, and if the kind of book, video, CD, etc. that they are looking for, whether be for “something to read” or on a specific subject is not readily found, a nonuser is created. It is hard to get these readers back after they have had an unsatisfactory experience.

1. It is all important that the collection serves the needs and wants of the user, not any notion of librarian as to what the user *should* be reading. The user is always successful in resisting these notions of others if they don't suit his/her desires.
2. The library should be serving the wants and needs of the average user, with some variance on either side of "average." The materials collection in the Fort Worth Public Library is title-heavy, copy-light. That is to say that the range of titles has traditionally been much larger than the average user wants or needs.
3. The Library needs to duplicate popular titles (those in high demand) rather than concentrate on titles receive very limited use by the public.
4. Three or more experienced selectors are needed by the Library for effective selection, with consideration of the differing clientele of the branches. There needs to be time to read reviews of forthcoming books (many titles, especially in fiction, should be ordered pre-publication) and to consider branch input.
5. The whole matter of books in languages other than English, especially in Fort Worth, where readers of other languages need to be served, is one which must be addressed, using specialists or offsite selectors.