

Library as Community Center: What does it mean to add “Community Center” to the name of a library?

A subcommittee of the Cornish Library was tasked to explore the meaning of “community center.” There were two parts designated: first, what does it mean for a library to be called a community center; and second, what are the policies and costs of having a community room in a library. Members of the subcommittee are Stephanie MacAndrew, Cindy Heath, Christ Surunis, and Laura Cousineau.

The question arose because of the donor’s request to call the renovated library the “Cornish Library and Community Center.” Accompanying documents cover:

- Donor Intent: Notes on the interview with the donor, Colleen O’Neill
- Benchmarking: Contact with local libraries directors and posted policies for community rooms.
- Chart: Comparative information gathered in library visits

What does it mean to call a library a “library and community center”?

It is clear from our interviews that most librarians, including our current Cornish librarian, say that the term is redundant. They see the library as a center for its community, reflecting that in the type of resources and programming that they provide. A library offers a safe and comfortable place for people to gather in groups and by themselves - both formally and informally - where people can read, and learn, and experience.

What do other public libraries call themselves? Our Cornish library is named the George H. Stowell **Free Library**. Close by, we have the Windsor **Public Library** and the Kilton **Public Library** (West Lebanon). A little further down the road in Vermont, you will find the Highgate **Library and Community Center**.

By agreeing with our donor’s request to call the newly renovated building The Cornish Library and Community Center, the emphasis is on the fact that the library is a place that strives to offer something for everyone in the community and that is there for everyone in the community. The library’s mission statement makes this clear:

The George H. Stowell Free Library (the “Library”) will perpetuate George H. Stowell’s interest in the intellectual welfare of the town and its people. The Library is committed to providing resources adequate to serve the varied needs of the patrons of Cornish and to providing equal opportunity for everyone to access, share, and create information.

Policies and Costs

Both proposed renovation plans make provisions for the use of library space for community meetings and gatherings. The Banwell Architect’s plan assure that a specific room can be accessed after hours by including a separate entrance, providing access to the kitchen and bathrooms, and maintaining security by locking off the rest of the library. Policies for use of the

library by outside groups would be developed by the trustees and would be based on policies used by other libraries, some of which are included in the attached documents. That designated room primarily be used for library programs, groups, and meetings such as children's arts and crafts projects, book clubs, technology workshops, and Trustee meetings; however, it would also be available to be reserved by community groups.

No library that the subcommittee contacted parceled out costs for their community rooms; none had ways to separate out the energy or other costs that might be associated it. Personnel costs for use after hours would be nil to minimal for Banwell's new library revision, as the separate entrance allows for the building to be used without library personnel present.

*Community Center Subcommittee Report respectfully submitted by Laura Cousineau, Chair
18 October 2022*

Appendices:

- *Notes on Conversation with Colleen O'Neill as regards naming the building the Cornish Library and Community Center*
- *Community Room Policies from other Area Libraries*
- *Library Community Room Benchmarking Visits and Calls*