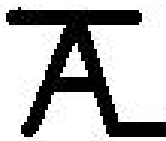


George H. Stowell Free Library
Cornish, NH
2022
Building Assessment
Report
May 2022



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This building assessment is an exploration of the current 1912 library building in Cornish and what would be needed to bridge the 110 years gap from what was then a modern library to what is now a modern library. An amazing amount of work has already been done & I have attempted not to duplicate what has been done.

This report is specifically not to consider the general store building, and not to focus on the economics of modifying the current building.

The concerns for this building seem to have focused on “ADA accessibility” requirements. While obviously a legal & ethical need, I am concerned that both town & architectural planning has not given sufficient consideration to the nature of modern library service and the needs & wants of the residents of Cornish for these services. It would be sad to provide accessibility to a building which will not meet the library service needs of the community in the decades to come.

Today’s – and tomorrow’s – successful public library is far from the book warehouse presided over by the repressive librarian of the stereotypical past. This library must be built, equipped, and staffed to serve the public and enhance the value of each user’s library visit.

Despite some projections of the death of the public library, the last two decades have shown continued growth in library usage nationally. The Pandemic of the last two plus years has demonstrated the flexibility of library service, and also shown the need for alterations in library buildings never seriously considered before.

Future libraries will need to incorporate new philosophies, technologies, spaces, and practices to provide the services America’s communities need.

Cornish is a small-sized (2020 census pop. 1616) town, spread out into sections. which does not seem to have significant seasonal population fluctuations. State of NH population projections do not anticipate significant change in the coming 20 years (2040 projection of 1603 people.

As population growth/decline does not seem to be a planning factor, it is necessary to look at services and accessibility.

The statistical analysis usually applied to libraries is greatly complicated by the legal and medical changes in our lives during the recent – and ongoing – pandemic. I have therefore done a small comparison analysis from the 2019 State Library Statistics. This compares building related numbers for several NH libraries of service populations similar to Cornish – in this case between 1500 & 1700 persons.

2019 (pre-covid) Selected Statistics Libraries with service population 1500 - 1700 Location	Popula- tion of Legal Service Area	Library Visits	Number of Regis- tered Users	Total Public Service Hours Per Year	Area in Square Feet of outlet	Square Footage per Capita
BYRON G. MERRILL LIBRARY	1,500	6,225	449	741	3,000	2.00
DUBLIN PUBLIC LIBRARY	1,585	3,084	no rpt	1,377	10,497	6.62
GEORGE HOLMES BIXBY MEMORIAL LIBRARY	1,585	7,557	1,050	1,360	5,403	3.41
FREEDOM PUBLIC LIBRARY	1,587	14,414	1,081	1,114	4,000	2.52
GEORGE H. STOWELL FREE LIBRARY	1,660	1,887	1,040	544	3,000	1.81
HANCOCK TOWN LIBRARY	1,665	23,166	1,378	1,664	3,160	1.90
BROWN MEMORIAL LIBRARY	1,685	8,017	1,405	1,456	5,000	2.97
LISBON PUBLIC LIBRARY	1,690	12,500	2,593	1,144	3,572	2.11
2019 (pre-covid) Selected Statistics Libraries with service population 1500 - 1700 Location	TOTAL Library Pro- grams	TOTAL Physical Item Circu- lation	Total Operating Revenue	Total Paid Employ- ees (FTE)	Internet Computers Used by General Public	Total Physical Items in Collect- ion
BYRON G. MERRILL LIBRARY	63	7,253	\$51,945	1.20	1	12,180
DUBLIN PUBLIC LIBRARY	105	5,276	\$91,962	1.60	4	19,240
GEORGE HOLMES BIXBY MEMORIAL LIBRARY	114	7,068	\$81,594	1.55	3	16,698
FREEDOM PUBLIC LIBRARY	315	23,007	\$112,265	1.35	6	17,214
GEORGE H. STOWELL FREE LIBRARY	2	2,657	\$22,022	0.48	2	9,472
HANCOCK TOWN LIBRARY	363	21,390	\$118,169	1.85	5	18,867
BROWN MEMORIAL LIBRARY	94	8,303	\$81,138	1.70	3	12,403
LISBON PUBLIC LIBRARY	5	3,727	\$64,795	1.15	2	11,535

These comparisons show Cornish at the bottom of all categories save one (public access computers), and that has changed to only one based on current information.

Pleasingly, library programming has dramatically increased in the last year and indications are that library usage is up in the increased hours. If the library is indeed better serving the residents, it will help to justify whatever library building improvement efforts are carried out.

What are the services that the people of Cornish need and want? Anecdotal reports & current user requests only measure some of this. A survey of users and current non-users is a critical tool, and I have submitted some suggestions. Talking with other stakeholders in town is also essential. Groups like teachers & PTAs, service organizations, social groups, churches, etc. can provide access through both in-person & electronic means of discussion. It is notable that there are currently no evening hours of service at the library. Is this a cause or an effect?

And what amount of space is needed? A quick walk around the library finds full shelves, tight corners, inadequate staff work space and little space to meet and a rather horrid cellar. It is, however, useful to apply some more quantifiable methods in our assessment.

The American Library Association has long discarded set numerical standards in favor of a series of planning process tools to design service measures and goals for today's libraries. I recommend that the library undertake some of these assessments.

New Hampshire has not had public library standards for three decades now. The Wisconsin Public Library Standards are often used as a guide in NH, as they have many similar small town libraries like NH, and unlike the large county library systems in many other states.

Applying the widely used Dahlgren library space needs assessment standards provides quantifiable measures to guide the planning of the library's physical future, based on current and projected services.

As an experiment, the current usage features of the library were plugged in to the Dahlgren assessment, using minimal features. It showed that what is being done in the current reported 3,000 square feet of space should take 3,746 square feet – and except for some non-assignable space, none of this should be in the cellar!

Many of the Dahlgren standards allow for a range of space options for given functions. I have applied low to mid-range options. It should be realized that in any older building not designed for open space, the nonassignable space will be higher than in new construction. This is not factored into this assessment.

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SPACE NEEDS WORKSHEET

INSTRUCTIONS: Fill in or check off all shaded worksheet cells.

DESIGN POPULATION

Projected resident population		1,600
Nonresident service population		0
Design population		1,600

COLLECTION SPACE

Books: The space needed for the library's book collection is determined by the size of the collection and the parameters of the shelving environment. Depending on factors such as the width of the aisles and the height of the shelving, book collections can be housed at 10, 13 or 15 volumes per square foot. As the volumes housed per square foot increases, the average aisle width will decrease, the height of the shelving will grow, and there will be fewer opportunities for marketing display.

- * How many volumes will be in the library's print collection? 8,000
- * What is the library's preferred collection density? (choose one) 10 volumes per sq.ft.
 13 volumes per sq.ft.
 15 volumes per sq.ft.

Magazine / newspapers: The Americans with Disabilities Act specifies that current issue display shelving for magazines is subject to height limitations, which conditions how much space magazines will need.

- * How many titles will the library receive? 10

Magazine backfile: Shelving for any back issues retained by the library is NOT subject to reach limitations but many libraries choose to treat these holdings in the same manner.

- * How many of those titles will the library retain in backfiles? 5
- * What will be the average backrun for a typical title (in years)? 5

Nonprint: This collection will often be housed on lower shelving with more marketing display, but because these items are typically smaller than books, the collection density corresponds to that for books. The space need varies depending on aisle widths, marketing display, and so on.

- * How many nonprint items will the library house? 800
- * What is the library's preferred collection density? (choose one) 10 items per sq.ft.
 13 items per sq.ft.
 15 items per sq.ft.

Public access computers: Many libraries today experience increasing demands for access to digital information resources, which affects the number of stations needed for the public. Wireless access can also affect the inventory needed. The space need per station will be affected by the number of stations provided: a small inventory will usually require more space per station while a larger inventory will benefit from economies of scale and less space per station.

- * How many public access computers to provide? 2
- * What is the preferred space allocation for each? (choose one) 35 sq.ft. per station
 45 sq.ft. per station
 50 sq.ft. per station

READER SEATING SPACE

The number of reader seats a library needs is determined in large measure by the number of people the library serves, although other factors may also affect this inventory. Typically allow 30 square feet per seat.

* How many reader seats should the library provide?

STAFF WORK SPACE

The inventory of staff work stations is based on the specific operations and work routines of the library, the number of public service desks, and so on. The space needed for each station, on average, will be affected by the number of work stations a library needs: a small inventory will require more space per station while a larger inventory will need less space per station.

* How many staff work stations are needed?

* What is the preferred space allocation for each? (choose one)
 125 sq.ft. per station
 140 sq.ft. per station
 150 sq.ft. per station

MEETING ROOM SPACE

Multi-purpose: How many seats to accommodate in a multi-purpose room?
Conference: How many seats to accommodate at a conference table?
How many seats in a gallery?
Storytime: What is the maximum audience for a typical storytime?
Do your storytimes include a craft or activity? (choose one) Yes No
Computer training lab: How many trainees should be accommodated?

SPECIAL USE SPACE

Special use space reserves space for features such as small group study rooms, a copy center, a public café or refreshment area, a used book sale area, a staff break room, and so on. A larger proportionate allocation here reserves the option to incorporate a wider array of special use functions as a specific architectural plan is developed.

* Choose the library's preferred allocation for special use space
 12% of gross area
 15% of gross area
 17% of gross area

NONASSIGNABLE SPACE

Nonassignable space reserves space for such necessary features as mechanical rooms, restrooms, stairwells and elevators. Typically a smaller building will need to reserve a larger share of its gross area for nonassignable purposes, while a larger building will require a smaller proportion for nonassignable. New construction will likely need a smaller proportion than an addition or renovation.

* Choose the library's preferred allocation for nonassignable
 25% of gross area
 27% of gross area
 30% of gross area

SPACE NEEDS SUMMARY

COLLECTION SPACE

8,000 volumes to house at	10 vol/sq.ft.	800 sq.ft.
10 magazine display at	1 sq.ft./title	10 sq.ft.
5 magazine backfile at	0.5 sq.ft./title/yr held	13 sq.ft.
800 nonprint items to house at	10 items/sq.ft.	80 sq.ft.
2 public access computers at	45 sq.ft. per station	90 sq.ft.

READER SEATING SPACE

8 reader seats at	30 sq.ft. per seat	240 sq.ft.
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STAFF WORK SPACE

2 staff work stations at	140 sq.ft. per station	280 sq.ft.
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MEETING ROOM SPACE (See notes 1 through 4)

15 multi-purpose seats	10 sq.ft. per seat	250 sq.ft.
6 conference room seats	30 sq.ft. per seat	180 sq.ft.
12 storytime seats	15 sq.ft. per seat	230 sq.ft.
0 computer training lab seats	50 sq.ft. per seat	0 sq.ft.

SPECIAL USE SPACE

calculated at 12% of gross building area	449 sq.ft.
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NONASSIGNABLE SPACE

calculated at 30% of gross building area	1,124 sq.ft.
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SPECIAL ALLOWANCES

_____	_____ sq.ft.
_____	_____ sq.ft.
_____	_____ sq.ft.
_____	_____ sq.ft.

GROSS AREA NEEDED	3,746 sq.ft.
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- NOTES
1. Multi-purpose room area includes a modest allocation for a speaker's podium.
 2. Conference room area includes allocation for gallery / audience seating, if so designated.
 3. Storytime area includes a modest allocation for storytime presenter.
 4. Computer training lab area includes a modest allocation for trainer's station.

Library staffing is affected by many factors. For service and security reasons, two staff members should always be present. Increased programming will require additional staffing at peak times, e.g. story hour and staff led programs. I have projected a need for two staff work-stations.

Projecting collection space needs is no longer a matter of presuming that a library will add more books over decades. The technological changes of the recent years show no signs of slowing. Trying to project these calls for a crystal ball. I do not project that the book will go away, but I do suspect that electronically accessed books will become increasingly popular. This leads one to project less need for increasing book stack space. If audio & video stored in electronic format and downloaded is a growing trend, shelf space that has gone from VHS to DVD and from records, to tapes, to CDs all may be less needed. The already developing concerns about access rights vs. ownership of materials in libraries may create renewed desire for physical media. I am providing for a slight increase in collection. It will be critical to allow for maximum flexibility of book/media storage systems by using freestanding and/or mobile units that can be substituted in the same space if called for in the future.

Now – what about the physical accessibility of the building? How does it fit into ADA, building, & life safety codes & standards?

In short – it doesn't.

The front access to the building is a rather daunting flight of stairs outside the building. It isn't even possible to put an item into the book return without climbing the stairs.



This is in no way accessible to anyone with mobility difficulties, many health issues, those with children in strollers or true handicapping conditions. There is no power door opener – and from a safety standpoint – the door opens INWARD, contrary to codes for emergency egress.

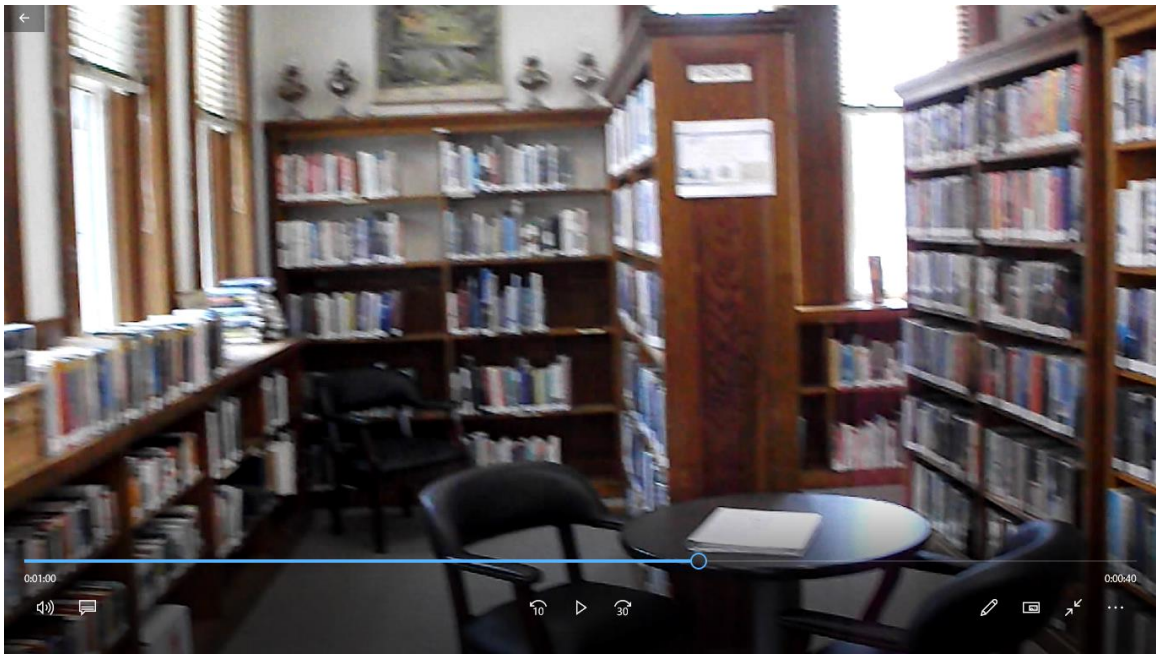
The only other means of egress, shy of breaking a window & jumping out, would be down the interior cellar stairs & up the exterior stairs in the rear of the building. Obviously not accessible – as is the entire cellar level.



Safety? A sprinkler system? Unfortunately, there is no running water. Or septic. Extensive efforts have already been undertaken to acquire a small plot of adjacent land to possibly add these last features, but certainly no capacity to feed a sprinkler system for safety in a building with such a heavy fire load as a library.

Speaking of a different type of “load”, my query about an engineering assessment of the floor load capacity revealed that this had not been done. Given the library standard of 150 pounds/sq. ft. of live load capacity, it would be necessary to know this before any renovation or movement of book stacks could safely be undertaken. Many libraries have been found to be substantially underbuilt.

Why move things about? There are a substantial number of areas and aisles where the ADA minimum of 36" (50" if the space is a dead end) is lacking. Tables & chairs & the librarian's desk clutter passageways.



Floor load permitting, relocating, rearranging, and possibly utilizing some mobile shelving could offer some limited improvements to accessibility & to flexibility of space use.

“Nonassignable space” is that portion of a building’s floor space that cannot be applied or assigned directly to library service. Some representative types of nonassignable space are furnace rooms, janitor’s closets, telecommunications closets, storage rooms, vestibules, corridors, stairwells, elevator shafts, and rest rooms. Such space is necessary to support the operation of the building, but it cannot be used directly for library service. Nonassignable space generally comprises about 25 to 30 percent of the gross square footage of the finished building.” (source: Dahlgren, Public Library Space Needs)

The entire cellar – below grade, with steep wooden stairs from the upper level, with uneven floors & probably with an insufficiently fire safe furnace room, should be eliminated from use, except possibly for inaccessible dead storage.

Another major shortcoming is the lack of parking – not just handicapped accessible parking, but any parking completely off the street. The adjacent building used by the Historical Society is inaccessible, and I am told, not a viable space for library use.



Changing times have also brought about these needs for changes in library buildings.

Reflecting society's desire to include all residents, the Americans with Disabilities Act and changes in building codes and standards require access for all.

Reflecting society's concern for physical safety, Fire & Life Safety codes and standards have changed drastically, as has enforcement of these requirements. Providing for contagious diseases and social distancing are a new concern for all of us.

To support the evolving model of cultural and intellectual service center in the community with service focusing on physical and virtual "visits" more than just circulation of physically archived materials, providing "a place away from home" for community residents, it will take a facility with greater and more flexible space.

Some plans have been proposed to build an addition which would provide additional space and provide accessibility to a rearranged original building. This concept has been used in other NH libraries similar in age to the current building. I would strongly encourage the Library Trustees & others to visit the Langdon Library in Newington (a beautiful extensive addition, utilizing the ground floor of the original building); the Minot-Sleeper Library in Bristol with an addition built in a very limited space); and the Whitefield Public Library a very low cost box built onto the back of a Carnegie library.)

Any addition or replacement space should have flexible multi-use space, available parking, take advantage of "green" and sustainable technologies, with appropriate climate control (Heating/Ventilation/Air conditioning throughout the library.

All public space should be on one or two floors, both for ease of access and to minimize long-term staffing requirements. Sightlines inside the building should be a significant factor in layout both for supervision of patron activity and for staff & patron safety.

One (or more) quiet study / private meeting rooms – approx. 100 sq. ft. each for table & 4 chairs - are a feature increasingly in demand in today's libraries. A coffee bar area or other social gathering area should be considered. This is a community gathering place feature that is growing in popularity in libraries

An exterior, probably drive-up, book return is a very popular feature. Never use a "thru-the-wall" type bookdrop – it is convenient for staff but a leading source of library fires.

The resulting building should meet all applicable accessibility requirements and building/safety codes including earthquake standards appropriate for the area.

The resulting building should feature one public entrance with weather barrier ("mud-room") which enters the building near a common staffing point ("circulation/service desk") for both security and provision of service. Multiple alarmed emergency exits should be provided, and security precautions for such possibilities as an active shooter are

needed in places we would never have thought of only a short time ago – including a small, rural library.

Closed storage space approximating 5% - 7% of total area should be maintained. The lack/loss of storage space is a leading cause of library “clutter” and inefficient use of space.

In summary, I see no means of making the current building properly accessible & safe without a major addition and proper parking.

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