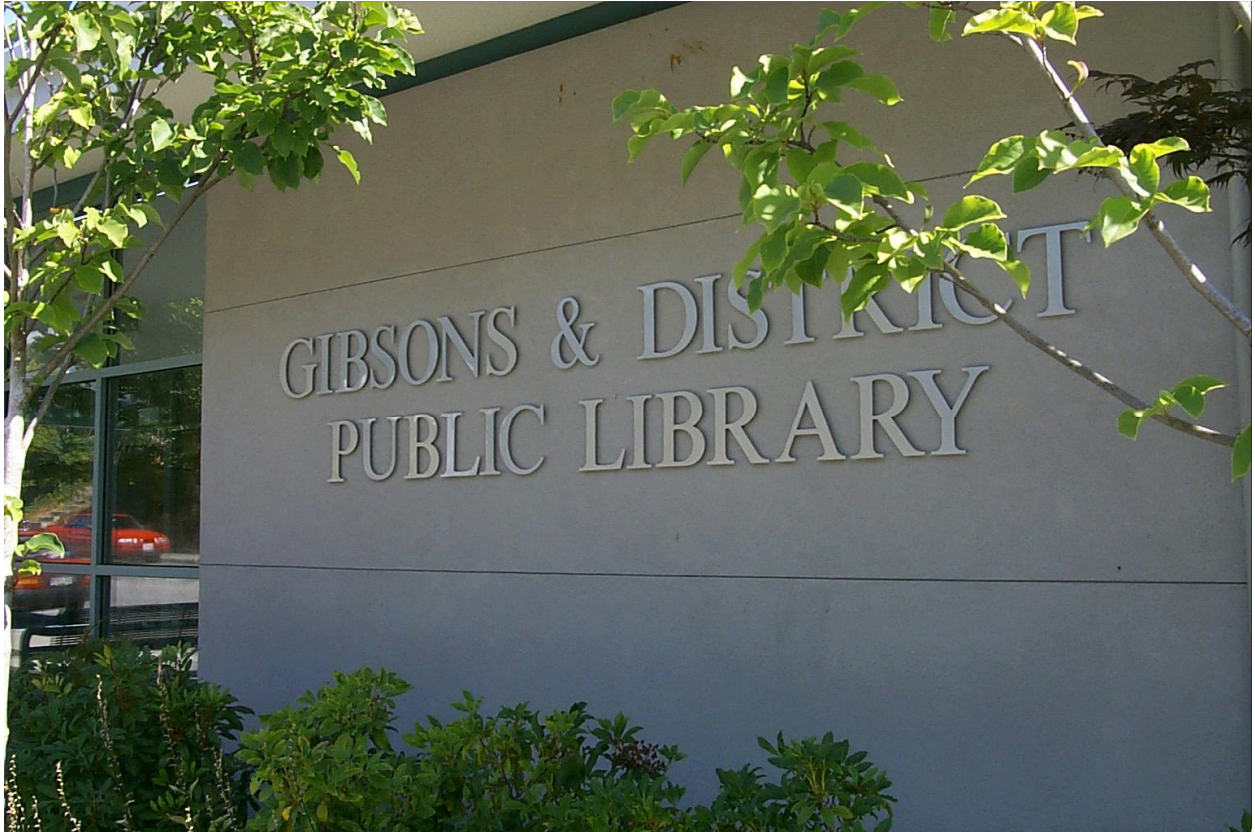


GIBSONS & DISTRICT PUBLIC LIBRARY FUTURE SPACE NEEDS ASSESSMENT



March 3, 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors of this report would like to thank the GDPL Library Board, Director and staff, our patrons, and all those from the Gibsons and SCRD communities who have participated in discussions and surveys, for their contributions, support and participation in helping to develop this study.

We humbly acknowledge that we work on the traditional unceded territory of the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation) and Shishahl Nation (Sechelt Nation.)

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THE ONLY THING THAT YOU ABSOLUTELY HAVE TO KNOW IS THE LOCATION OF THE LIBRARY.

Albert Einstein

From its humble beginnings in 1914 as a couple of boxes of books circulated among neighbours, the Gibsons & District Public Library has grown to become the province's 30th largest library system and the 10th largest by circulation per capita, with over 60% of our population as active members. As it has grown, the library has evolved from being a repository of information to assuming a key role as the community's social hub. We offer a wide variety of programs, provide crucial information and technology to those without access, and are a warm and welcoming space for all, regardless of income.

This growth has meant that the GDPL is working beyond its capacity. We make do with only 0.052 m² per capita instead of the average for comparable BC libraries of 0.064 and recommended values of 0.065 - 0.075 m² per capita. This means that we are currently functioning with less than 650 m² when other comparable libraries have 800 – 950 m².

This lack of space is having a big impact on our ability to develop and expand. We have to aggressively cull our collection when we introduce new books. We cannot add to the programs offered because our meeting room is fully booked. We are limited in what new important technology we can introduce because creating such permanent spaces, which are vital to attracting the younger generations, would require eliminating current successful functions and programs. We are also one of the last free public places available to all residents of the coast regardless of means, a role we want to encourage, which puts pressure on the reading and relaxing seating areas within the building. All this is compounded by the rapid increase in population of the southern Sunshine Coast and further exacerbated by the current pandemic situation.

The need for additional floorspace was first identified in 2007. Since then, stop-gap measures have been used to fill the need. But in order to continue to develop as a library and properly service our residents, we must address the issue of space soon and explore ways to expand so that the GDPL continues to be the vital community hub that we all envision and desire.



INTRODUCTION

Library service in Gibsons began in 1914 with a wooden box of books that circulated among the various homes and stores in town. By 1955 that collection was too big for its boxes and was moved into the first library building on Winn Road. By the 1980's the collection was again surpassing its available space so, after a public referendum, the Gibsons & District Public Library (GDPL) Board opened its striking new 7,170 square foot facility - the building owned by the Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD) on land leased from the Town of Gibsons and operated by the Library Director and Staff with oversight from the Library Board.

Since that time, our membership has grown dramatically, serving nearly 60% of the 13,000 area residents. It has expanded its role to include a wide range of programming and acts as a dynamic and thriving community hub for all, regardless of income. In 2019, we welcomed 110,593 in-person visits and had a membership of 7,811 patrons. The areas served (the Town of Gibsons and SCR D areas D, E & F) continue to grow, with no let-up in sight. Although the library building is only the 30th largest in BC, it is the 10th largest in circulation per capita. In addition, the GDPL's increasing function as one of the last free public places for people of all walks of life and income levels to relax out of the weather has put extra pressure on our available space.

The need for additional space, and proposed expansion solutions, was first identified in a 2007 report by MGB Architecture¹. A reconfiguration was undertaken in 2015² to free up additional space within the existing building. However, the population boom and the steady increase in usage by our large membership mean that, once again, the GDPL is working beyond its capacity and in need of more square footage. During a Board/ Staff working session on November 7, 2019 this need was identified as an urgent priority. It is currently being exacerbated by the physical distancing requirements of the Covid-19 pandemic, but the problem was already becoming acute with the projected population increases, the need to develop our programming, and our expanding use as a community hub.

The current restrictions mean that the physical collection of books, magazines, audiobooks, DVDs, and CDs is being limited by the amount of shelf space available. Program offerings are unnecessarily limited due to lack of capacity. And with staffing levels higher than the building was designed to accommodate, employees are squeezed into a communal office area that does not allow for efficiency of workflow.

As a progressive and future focused organization, our vision being that all residents enrich their lives and communities through the library, we want to ensure we can continue to meet the essential ingredients of that for our expanding population. The unique physical beauty of GDPL, with its fabulous view over Howe Sound and the North Shore



¹ Gibsons & District Public Library – Library Expansion Planning, MGB Architecture & Design, 2007

² Gibsons and District Public Library Facility Study, Cameron Consulting Services, 2015

mountains, is greatly appreciated by both residents and the many tourists who visit, and it is a credit to our community that everyone can enjoy comprehensive library services from such a spectacular vantage point. We need to ensure that we can continue to meet our mission of connecting everyone to the world of culture, knowledge and ideas through our resources, expertise and inspiration.

EXPLORING OUR LIBRARY

BUILDING A FIRST CLASS LIBRARY

The Gibsons & District Public Library offers access to an extensive collection of books, newspapers and magazines, available both from the library itself and in partnership with other libraries around the province. We also have DVDs and music CDs available for loan. E-books and audiobooks may be signed out by members through the BC Libraries Cooperative's Library2Go service. Through the website, members can also access numerous e-magazines and e-newspapers, databases and subscription websites, online courses through Niche Academy, and stream independent movies and documentaries through Kanopy and Indieflix.

In response to Covid-19, GDPL has expanded its digital resources and online presence, resulting in a significant increase in membership. Loans of e-books and audiobooks have been increasing steadily and this trend will likely continue during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition to printed books, magazines, newspapers and periodicals, there are seven public computers, a printer, a scanner, and a photocopier for in-library use. Wi-Fi is available throughout and can be accessed outside the building at all hours. Many members without access to computers or Wi-Fi rely on these services and there is often a wait to access them. Unfortunately, the building has only one meeting room, with a maximum capacity of 39. We recently added a wireless projector and audio



system to expand the room's capabilities, but demand for it far exceeds its availability.

The space constraints mean that staff must aggressively weed the shelves when new books are introduced in order to prevent the available shelving from being overwhelmed. This effectively prevents the library from expanding its collection, which in turn limits our ability to become a net book lender and prevents us from developing niche fields of specialization, such as a Sunshine Coast living history section or an Indigenous Studies section in conjunction with the Sechelt and Squamish Nations. Excessive

LIBRARIES STORE THE ENERGY THAT FUELS THE IMAGINATION. THEY OPEN UP WINDOWS TO THE WORLD AND INSPIRE US TO EXPLORE AND ACHIEVE, AND CONTRIBUTE TO IMPROVING OUR QUALITY OF LIFE. LIBRARIES CHANGE LIVES FOR THE BETTER.

Sidney Sheldon

culling wastes taxpayer dollars as books are removed before their value and usefulness has ended, simply because there is no room to shelve them.

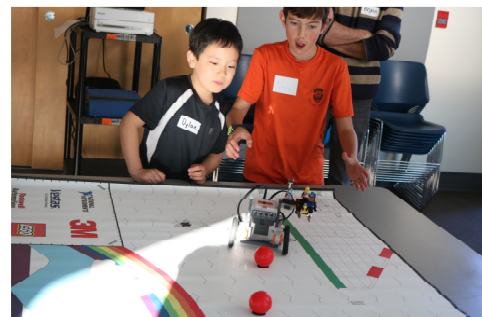
Even more importantly, culling the book selection too often prevents the diversity of opinion necessary for a first-class library. While you can order books from other libraries (although some key references are for “in-house use only”) this simply isn’t the same as browsing in your field of interest in your local library. In this era of “fake news” and internet conspiracy theories it is critical for a democratic society that libraries present a well-rounded perspective with a wide breadth of opinion, which is impossible when resources are over-culled.

EMBRACING NEW TECHNOLOGY

Our lack of space also means we are unable to move into the future with the new and advancing technologies many libraries are embracing and which are essential for attracting younger generations. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, we expect that more people will be working, studying and learning remotely and will need technology to make this possible; this is particularly important in a smaller semi-rural area like the Sunshine Coast. If we wish to maintain our key position as a leading purveyor of information services, we need to expand and embrace new technology.

A consequence of the rapid advancements in technology is an increase in the digital divide between those who have and understand technology, and those who don’t. Bridging this divide will be both a challenge and an opportunity for libraries, and our technological resources will need to be expanded dramatically to prevent our membership from being left behind. The need for assistance in understanding the use of new digital technology will also increase with the population and with the introduction of even more devices connected to the internet – all requiring changes to staff skills, education, and expertise.

It is a common misperception that technology will reduce costs and space requirements for libraries. Although this is true of some technologies, such as e-books, technological change is resulting in a re-allocation of square footage to house new technology. The cost of stocking a library solely with e-books is cost prohibitive, significantly higher than buying hard copies. In addition, any room-saving from e-books is offset by requirements for such things as additional computer workstations, equipment storage, and training areas, in an increasingly interconnected and complex digital world. The American Library Association has identified some of the technologies that are likely to impact libraries, which include artificial intelligence, the internet of things, the use of robots and drones, and virtual reality. Many libraries are already embracing and providing spots for virtual reality rooms, makerspace collaborative areas and places where members can use technical equipment to explore and develop their digital creativity (produce art, record music, create podcasts and films, or simply copy family photos and videos). Libraries that have successfully introduced these kinds of digital



areas have needed to be very flexible in adjusting their planning with the resulting upsurge in patron use.

EXPANDING PROGRAMMING

Urban sociologist, Eric Klinenberg could well have been referring to our own Gibsons & District Public Library when he said:

“The accessible physical space of the library is not the only factor that makes it work well as social infrastructure. The institution’s extensive programming, organized by a professional staff that upholds a principled commitment to openness and inclusivity, fosters social cohesion among clients who might otherwise keep to themselves.”

As the library has evolved, the regular programming services provided for patrons of all ages have become of equal or greater importance to the more traditional print materials. They include Story Time for both babies and preschoolers, Tween, Teen, Adult and Queer book clubs, conversation groups in French and Japanese, a knitting group, open microphone nights, a Lego builders club, a repair café and much more. Outreach and youth programs provided augment the government health and social services and are part of the vital social fabric necessary for those who need assistance. Staff regularly assist users with technology matters, including running several workshops on basic computer use and recently, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, providing seminars on the use of online meeting tools such as Zoom. This year was particularly challenging with the social distancing requirements created by

**TO BUILD UP A LIBRARY IS
TO CREATE A LIFE. IT’S
NEVER JUST A RANDOM
COLLECTION OF BOOKS.**

Carlos Maria Domínguez

the pandemic, but the library staff was able to make many programs available online to keep patrons connected. New in 2020, was an online Summer Reading Program for children and a Virtual Art Jam for all ages. Planning for the near future will include additional Truth and Reconciliation events to foster understanding and closer ties with the Squamish and Sechelt Nations.

While we currently have a very robust program, it is limited by the available space. Our lone meeting room, the Mainil Room, is normally fully booked, and when local organizations request the use of it they are often denied. For GDPL to continue to develop we must expand our programming reach to all segments of our community. The staff has identified a need to expand our services for young people, but adding new after-school events is impossible if there is already an established program in the requisite time slot.

Recently our staff reorganized and expanded the young children’s section of the library, resulting in a dramatic increase in use. The staff feels strongly that they need to create a similar dedicated area for teens but there is no option currently available. The result is to artificially limit participation by this essential group of future GDPL users.



Similarly, the Sunshine Coast has a very strong artistic presence, with internationally renowned leaders in all of the arts fields: painting, architecture, sculpture, literature, music, theatre, dance and cinema. We have already developed strong links with the Sechelt Festival of the Written Arts and broadening the scope of the artistic side of the library is a logical next step but impossible given our current size constraints.

Our programming has become so successful because we have adopted an “if you build it, they will come” approach, appropriately trying to offer something for all groups within the population. This approach is fundamental in expanding our position as a vital community hub. Unfortunately, we are now in a position where this is increasingly becoming impossible. In building a better library, the status quo is simply not an acceptable option and we must address our additional size requirement to continue expanding our successful programming.

OUR ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY

The GDPL has evolved from being a repository of information to assuming a key role as the community’s social hub. We have embraced our responsibility as provider of a wide variety of services traditionally not associated with libraries. Increasingly the library is seen as one of the few remaining publicly funded areas where people can gather out of the weather regardless of their means, particularly relevant during the cold winter months.

As Town of Gibsons Mayor Bill Beamish said recently:

“A dynamic library is critical to this community. Our library is our path to the wider world and a place where our community connects. Where even the most vulnerable members of our community feel welcomed and accepted.”

This evolution has not been without challenges. Our service has been complicated by the coast’s steadily expanding population, particularly young families and the above-average demographic of seniors, resulting in a steady increase in membership and daily usage. We also live in an area faced with concerns of low-income, isolation and homelessness. Our developing popularity as a safe haven for the disadvantaged has impacted the available seating and reading areas and the GDPL’s ability to expand its physical collection and programming. Further compounding these issues are the challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic, the economic downturn and fiscal restraint, all of which are expected to last into the future.

**OUR LIBRARY IS A CENTRE
OF LEARNING AND
KNOWLEDGE AND
COMMUNITY GATHERING,
THE IDEAL OF WHAT A
LIBRARY SHOULD BE.**

*Patrick Bocking,
Superintendent SD#46*

Until now the primary goals as laid out in our 2019 – 2023 strategic plan have been met effectively in spite of the intense population growth on the Sunshine Coast and the ongoing need for us to expand our resources. We want our library to continue to be a champion for the requirements of all in providing responsive services, a broad range of programming and an important meeting space, and as the community’s living room, allowing

people from all walks of life to interact. The GDPL's expanding responsibility within the community challenges our current size and a creative solution is needed in order that our vital functions can continue to meet the must-haves of an expanding population.

FUTURE NEEDS

A rising population, changes in technology, and increasing levels of homelessness have combined to create a shortfall of available space that is becoming more acute with time. Compounding this is the fact that we are the 10th busiest library in the province for circulation per capita and have a much higher than average percentage of active library users.

**WITHOUT LIBRARIES WHAT
HAVE WE? WE HAVE NO
PAST AND NO FUTURE.**

Ray Bradbury

Currently the GDPL occupies 646 square meters (6950 ft²) on its main floor plus an outside balcony of 30 square meters (319 ft²). There is a below ground parking area of 650 square meters (6995 ft²) which is shared with the Town of Gibsons. The main floor is divided roughly into:

Administration	10%
Washrooms	5%
Books/Magazines	50%
Meeting Room	10%
Seating and Learning Areas	20%
Entranceway, Storage and Miscellaneous	5%

The building has a floor area ratio of 0.052 m²/capita, compared to an average for comparable BC libraries of 0.064, and recommended values of 0.065 - 0.075 m²/capita. As the population increases we will fall further behind if no action is taken.

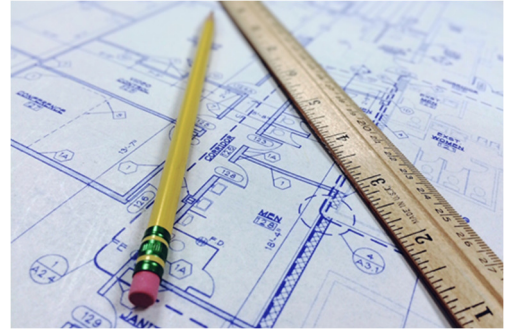
For a community of our size our library should today be 800 - 950 square meters - an additional 150 to 300 square meters. The 2007 MGB report indicated 1644 m² would be needed by 2030. Additional floor area is essential to accommodate future progress.

Over the years, there have been considerable efforts made to maximize the utilization of what is available but the overall size limitation of the building is the major constraint to increasing the programs offered to our members. The administration office is crowded and inefficient. There is no room to expand our collection. There is no capacity for multiple room bookings so we cannot add to our programming. In short, we need more room for meeting rooms, administration, bookshelves, activity areas and reading areas.³

³ Many of these issues were previously identified in the 2007 and 2015 facility studies.

OPTIONS FOR EXPANSION

The 2007 MGB study identified several options for expansion and concluded an expansion to the east and south would be preferred. In the 13 years since that report was written there have been changes in technology, construction costs, parking requirements, and community priorities. There are also alternatives to expansion, which might include partnering with other organizations or the construction of an entirely new building. However, given the immediacy of the problem and the unique requirements of the library, expansion in some form is the most practical and preferred solution.



Although the MGB study identified a preferred option for expansion, it would be prudent to consider other possibilities. Some options have been identified below as a starting point for further investigation. Further study will be required to determine the best and most cost-effective approach.

Option 1 (as described in the 2007 MGB report) – Expand the library to the east (towards the Town Hall) and on two levels to the south (towards the water). This option most directly addresses the needs of the GDPL.

Option 2 – Close in all or part of the parking area and repurpose it for internal library use. Currently the garage is underutilized, and parking used by the Town could potentially be moved to the Tourist Information Centre. The present parking lot could then be converted to a teen-focused area, a meeting room, computer areas and a makerspace area.

Option 3 – Enclose the deck for interior use. This would only provide a small additional area, insufficient to address future requirements. It would also remove a popular feature of the library and one that is used as additional seating during good weather.

CONCLUSION

A LIBRARY IN THE MIDDLE OF A COMMUNITY IS A CROSS BETWEEN AN EMERGENCY EXIT, A LIFE-RAFT AND A FESTIVAL. THEY ARE CATHEDRALS OF THE MIND; HOSPITALS OF THE SOUL; THEME PARKS OF THE IMAGINATION. ON A COLD RAINY ISLAND, THEY ARE THE ONLY SHELTERED PUBLIC SPACES WHERE YOU ARE NOT A CONSUMER, BUT A CITIZEN INSTEAD.

Caitlan Moran

Since its inception in 1914, the Gibsons & District Public Library has expanded and changed its function from the traditional 'lender of books' to a vital multi-faceted community hub. It has become an anchor for those newly unemployed during the pandemic in these harsh economic times that are looking to upgrade their skills for re-employment or seeking assistance from government programs and online services.

It is a safe haven for the marginalized seeking a warm shelter and companionship. It is one of the few remaining accessible public places for patrons young and old, a meeting place for groups of likeminded individuals, and a resource centre par excellence. Our library plays a unique part in this community. All patrons are made to feel welcome and are treated equally and respectfully by our superb staff.

Unfortunately, the size of the present library has become inadequate for the rising population of the lower Sunshine Coast areas that it serves. For our patrons, we need more public meeting rooms, an area for teens to complement our young children's area, a larger area for increased public computer and technology access, a makerspace and creativity area to attract the new generation of library users and forge a closer link to our large artistic population, and increased seating for those who want to experience our vibrant community hub. To achieve the four primary goals set out in our 2019-2023 strategic plan, build community, encourage and enable lifelong learning, invigorate people and culture, and create welcoming spaces and resources, we need to investigate ways of expanding the physical area available and allow the Gibsons & District Public Library to continue to be the public focal point it has become. We need to provide the means by which it can improve and expand on that role into the distant future. The status quo is simply not an option.

THE HEALTH OF OUR CIVILIZATION, THE DEPTH OF OUR AWARENESS ABOUT THE UNDERPINNINGS OF OUR CULTURE AND OUR CONCERN FOR THE FUTURE CAN ALL BE TESTED BY HOW WELL WE SUPPORT OUR LIBRARIES.

Carl Sagan

REFERENCES AND NOTES

Expanding Horizons: Gibsons & District Public Library Strategic Plan – 2019 to 2023

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Albert Einstein – German-born theoretical physicist

Ray Bradbury – American author

Carlos Maria Domínguez – Argentinian writer and journalist

Eric Klinenberg – American sociologist and scholar of urban studies, culture, and media

Caitlan Moran – English journalist, author, and broadcaster

Carl Sagan – American astronomer, scientist, and author

Sidney Sheldon – American writer, director, and producer