
Reuben Hoar Library

Focus Group Report

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Reuben Hoar Library Focus Groups

October 18, 2011
and
October 26, 2011

Contents	Page
Introduction	2
Methodology	2
Recommendations	3
Library Building	3
Library Services	4
Focus Group Summaries	5
Group 1: October 18, 2011	5
Group 2: October 26, 2011	9
Appendix 1: Focus Group Questions	13

Introduction

The Reuben Hoar Library administration is undertaking the study of a possible expansion of the facility (or new building) that will meet the needs of Littleton for the next twenty years. As part of the information gathering process, the Trustees hired Consultant Sondra Vandermark to facilitate two focus groups. The focus group process was to obtain initial information from Littleton residents regarding interest in a Library expansion project. The information gathered will be used in the development of the Library's Planning and Design Grant application anticipated from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners.

Each focus group session began with a general introduction and explanation by the facilitator. Participants were informed that the focus group discussions are exploratory and individual responses are important. Responses are confidential.

Although the primary purpose of the focus groups was to collect information about resident interest in the potential expansion of the Library facility, a number of comments made during the focus group sessions related to library services. Highlights from the library services comments are included in this report.

Participants in each focus group had very positive comments to make about Library Director Laura Zalewski and the Reuben Hoar Library staff.

Methodology

Library Director Laura Zalewski, the trustees, and several Library staff suggested potential participants for the focus groups. Laura Zalewski coordinated the invitation process and provided refreshments and meeting space at the Library.

Participants were long-time Littleton residents. The shortest time of residency in the community was 5 years and the longest was 60 years. The average length of residency was 21.5 years. Details about the length of residency are available in each group summary.

The focus groups were held on October 18 and October 26, 2011. Each group met for approximately one and one-half hours each. Each group was asked the same questions. (See Appendix 1.) Responses from each Focus Group are provided in the Focus Group Summaries.

Consultant Sondra Vandermark took notes at each session. The notes were evaluated and compiled to document recurring themes discussed in the sessions. A draft report was written. Library Director Laura Zalewski and the Trustees reviewed the November 8, 2011 draft report. The draft report was accepted and finalized on November 15, 2011 as the *Reuben Hoar Library Focus Group Report*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Focus Group recommendations are divided into sections: Library Building and Library Services. The recommendations evolved during the discussions of the participants. Implementing the recommendations will expand the Library administrations ability to address the library needs of Littleton residents.

Library Building

The following comments address elements the Focus Group participants desire in an expanded Littleton Library facility.

- LOCATION: Participants like the location of the current library. There was concern about the feasibility of expanding at the current site because of the Town offices in the remainder of the building.
- Library Access:
 - Critical for people with disabilities
 - Critical for families with young children
 - Seniors
- Want Drive-up service window for picking up reserve materials
- Collections
 - More books
 - Logical flow of materials
- Children's Area
 - More convenient location for families with young children, i.e., the first floor
 - Logical layout
- Young Adult (Teen) Area:
 - Happy with revised space
 - Would like more room for books
 - Want small group study space
- Additional Group Space:
 - More meeting room space
 - Small group study space where one can talk about school or work projects
 - Expanded space for reading magazines
 - Tutoring space
- Ambiance:
 - The facility should be attractive, organized and clean
 - The elevator needs to be easier to use
- Community Center:
 - Accommodate all age groups
 - Welcoming
 - Space for all kinds of programs
 - Art displays

- Technology:
 - Want space for additional computers
 - Faster Internet access

Library Services

The following comments address elements the Focus Group participants desire in an expanded Littleton Library facility. The Focus Group participants were positive about the Library services provided through the Reuben Hoar Library.

- Staff: Helpful, knowledgeable, and highly regarded by residents
- The Library needs to make more efficient and attractive use of space
- Advertising of Library services for all ages
- Technology:
 - Some children do not have access to computer technology at home
 - Library needs increased bandwidth to support Internet use
 - Continue to develop excellent web page
 - Lend new technologies (such as e-readers) so residents have a chance to become familiar with products
 - Need to improve the Evergreen catalog (new MVLC computer catalog platform)
- Library Programs:
 - Very popular and well received
 - More intergenerational programming (partner with schools, council on aging, other groups)
 - Desire for music and author programs
 - Summer Reading Program is *Fabulous*
- Hours:
 - Everyone wants longer hours.
 - Everyone realizes that it is a budget issue.
 - Expanded Library service hours is the highest priority for Focus Group participants.
 - Why is the Library closed on Friday in the summer? (Perfect time for teens to use the Library!)
- Several participants in each focus group suggest that Library service is good enough.

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARIES

Group 1: October 18, 2011

This summary documents major points made during the October 18, 2011 Focus Group discussion. Items written in *italics* indicate areas of strong agreement among participants.

The majority of the nine attendees in Group 1 have lived in Littleton for significant lengths of time, with 5 years being the shortest length of time. Others have lived in Littleton for 6 years, 10 years, 11 years (2 people), 24 years, 28 years, 37 years, and 47 years.

Group 1 included a cross section of the general adult population. All but one person uses the Reuben Hoar Library. That person said he had no need to use the library—not aware of what the library offers. However the person’s family uses the library. In addition, over two-thirds of the participants use the Acton Public Library.

Other libraries are used when people need something not immediately available at the Reuben Hoar Library and they cannot wait for ILL, or the requests are specialized and they have access to New York Public Library or other large libraries.

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word Library?

"Books, Books, Books."

"Reading."

"Research."

"Free."

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear Reuben Hoar Library?

"The staff is so skilled and friendly."

"Easy."

"Convenient."

"Cramped."

"Discombobulated and disorganized."

"Antiquated."

Is there something about the Library that is perfect right now?

"Love self-service checkout. It is fabulous."

"The centralized location."

"Membership in MVLC makes the Library so valuable."

"The museum passes."

"The Library web site is almost perfect."

"The Summer Reading Program is wonderful—always!"

The Trustees are considering expanding the Reuben Hoar Library. They are interested in your opinion of what should be available in an expanded building. What would you like?

General comments:

"Better organization of children's room--you need a librarian to help find specific items."

Three participants said, "The Library does not need to be expanded. It is a portal to materials—more space is not of importance"

Five participants said, "Yes, more space is important for study, quiet space, more books, better space for magazines, better space for kids for after school, access to computers, and quiet/noisy options."

Question from participants for Library administration: "Who are the library's customers? Pay attention to what kids do. They read fiction but use computers for everything else."

The following bulleted items are elements the Library administration especially wanted to address as part of the Focus Group discussion. There are one or more comments about each bulleted item.

- More materials: books, DVDs, magazines, cds, other
 - "Yes for books, not so much for other materials"
- Alternative materials such as e-books, iPads, Playaways or using content on smart phones, mp3 players, iPods
 - Three participants have e-readers so there is some interest in e-materials: "can change size of text, libraries have digital downloads"
- Technology: access to Internet, electronic databases
 - "Great from home and work"
 - "Need computers for kids; most access from home"
- Programming: adult, children's, YA, other
 - "Summer Reading Program is Fabulous"
 - "Need more programs for young children (pre-school)"
- Special interests: Littleton History, Seniors, Computer training
 - "Like Genealogy, Brown bag lunches—job help"

- Handicapped access
 - “Difficult, if not impossible to use library with a stroller.”
- Additional parking
 - “Yes.”
- Quiet study rooms, meeting spaces, display areas (arts)
 - “Quiet study” and “additional meeting spaces desirable”
 - “Art display areas”
- Other (Floor plan, one floor, etc.)
 - “Building is configured vertically—should be horizontal—*space evolved rather than designed*”
 - “The reality is that the Library will probably stay in current building—take over some additional space”
- Community store, a café, other possibilities.
 - “Like coffee station.”

What would make the Reuben Hoar Library a better place to visit? What one change to improve the library would you make?

- “Reorganize the children’s room”
- “Expand the computer and research (reference) areas and separate the spaces—current locations interfere with use of each; computer work can be noisy whereas reference work is quiet work”
- “More space”
- “Additional hours—especially Sunday hours” (realize it costs money)
- “Identify spaces as quiet or noisy”

How do you see your information needs changing (for example: use computers, access from home, school, work, e-materials, and/or digital collections)?

- “Information needs are different from recreational reading. Computers are for information—print is for recreational reading”
- “The Library is not a substitute for the Internet—Library is an additional source of information
- “Book clubs need materials available both as e-books and print”
- “Newspapers—most no longer subscribe—view online”

We have talked about a wide range of issues today. Are there any other topics or concerns we haven't touched upon? Is there anything else about your own library experience you would like to share with the group?

"I use the Library to validate what I found on the Internet—check resources at Library—even this is changing as one can check with a network of fellow enthusiasts on a subject."

"People don't know what Libraries have—marketing, education Why should I use the Library?"

"Market the Library as Local news, although most participants don't read. Is the Library on Facebook?"

"Littleton needs a Community Hangout instead of B&N or Starbucks"

"Immigration changes will increase the need for more computers at Libraries for kids to do homework—the new generation of Americans. How has Littleton's population changed in the 2010 census? Is there more diversity? What will be the impact of the new IBM facility?"

"Friends donate to the Library. If I don't use it, I won't donate"

"School choice: families are selecting other town school systems as perceived with better education and libraries"

"Evergreen—less user friendly than old system"

"Staff is very knowledgeable—more than friendly, they take as personal challenge to assist Library users"

"Push rather than PULL Library information to the community" (Example: Rather than ask residents to sign up for e-mail notices send notices to them unless they unsubscribe from e-mail)

"The Library needs input from teens—another focus group or some other way of getting their input as they are the Library users of the future."

Group 2: October 26, 2011

This summary documents major points made during the October 26, 2011 Focus Group discussion. Items written in *italics* indicate areas of strong agreement among participants.

The majority of the 13 attendees in Group 2 have lived in Littleton for significant lengths of time, with 6 years being the shortest length of time. Others have lived in Littleton for 7 years, 11 years, 12 years (2 people), 13 years, 14 years, 15 years (2 people), 40 years, 44 years (2 people), and 60 years.

All 13 attendees use the Reuben Hoar Library. In addition, one uses the Hanscom ABF Library (near work); one uses the Acton Citizens' Library; one uses Acton, Andover, and Lawrence public libraries and unnamed libraries for historic research.

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word Library?

"Comfort"

"comfy"

"Books, Books, Books, Books, Books, Books, Books"

"Community"

"Answers"

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear Reuben Hoar Library?

"My Library card number"

"Town offices"

"Lobby area"

"Convenience"

"Welcoming"

"Friendly & Helpful staff"

"Quaint"

"Comfortable"

"Awesome children's librarian"

"Answers"

Is there something about the Library that is perfect right now?

"Location is great, in the center of the community"

"Customer service is excellent and professional "

"Staff is super organized—and loves reading"

"Programming"

"Circular driveway"

"Coffee & Tea station"

The Trustees are considering expanding the Reuben Hoar Library. They are interested in your opinion of what should be available in an expanded building. What would you like?

One participant stated that the Reuben Hoar Library meets all library service needs. There is no need for expansion.

General comments:

There were four teens in Group 2. They want space for doing their homework, for projects, and quiet study areas.

"An elevator that opens on each floor without needing a key."

"More room for community activities (with a stage so activities are more visible)"

"Space to gather"

"Drive up window (for picking up materials) without getting out of one's car"

"Circular driveway (i.e., keep it)"

"Storage"

"More work space for staff (retired library staff recommended)"

"A media—listening center (sound proof)"

"Bigger space for teens (very comfy right now since received grant—and got teen input)"

The following bulleted items are elements the Library administration especially wanted to address as part of the Focus Group discussion. There are one or more comments about each bulleted item.

- More materials: books, DVDs, magazines, cds, other

"Room for more books"

"More comfortable, less crowded space for reading magazines"

"ILL is great—but want more books at the Library"

- Alternative materials such as e-books, iPads, Playaways or using content on smart phones, mp3 players, iPods

"Love playaways—want more" (1 person)

"Not fond of e-materials (will take e-reader on trip); some try title on e-reader, then if they like the book they buy the print version. All like the physical book."

"Need help with downloads. The Library could have e-readers that people can borrow"

"IPads will change library use"

- Technology: access to Internet, electronic databases

"Technology changes use of the Library—libraries need to evolve with new technology"

"It is great to access the Library from home and work"

"ILL works because of technology, accessing account for renewals, etc."

"Wish books were used more"

"Use Internet for research"

"The Library needs more computers"

"The Internet connection isn't as good as at most homes"

"People need to be careful about information from the Internet; the Library can help with classes"

- Programming: adult, children's, YA, other

"Need community space for activities, including music and authors, to get people involved (ex: Firehouse Café, Lyceum, Talent Night)"

"Teen programming is great"

- Special interests: Littleton History, Seniors, Computer training

"Library Partnerships for programming with senior center & schools—multigenerational programming"

"Need a genealogy (or Littleton History) database for accessing local history"

"Littleton needs vocational programming"

- Handicapped access

"Yes, impossible to use library with young children—elevator difficult to use"

- Additional parking

"Yes, more parking"

- Quiet study rooms, meeting spaces, display areas (arts)

“Need all of these”

- Other (Floor plan, one floor, etc.)

No comments

- community store, a café, other possibilities.

“More space for coffee”

What would make the Reuben Hoar Library a better place to visit? What one change to improve the library would you make?

“The downstairs is kind of creepy”

“I want the space to be beautiful for the Library staff and residents.”

“More hours—talked about person who paid for Sunday hours one year (Everyone in the Focus Group loved it!!!)”

“The appearance of the place needs improving.”

“Better signs with lights announcing events”

“More study rooms”

“A better flow of the materials. Very cut up now”

How do you see your information needs changing (for example: use computers, access from home, school, work, e-materials, and/or digital collections)?

No specific comments.

We have talked about a wide range of issues today. Are there any other topics or concerns we haven't touched upon? Is there anything else about your own library experience you would like to share with the group?

“The Library should do a better job letting the schools know what is happening at the Library”

“Intergenerational programming”

“Please, fix the elevator”

“It would be good to increase the footprint of the library, giving it more space.”

“The Library needs to be more of a community space.”

“The lower level is kind of creepy.”

“Library should be the community center”

Appendix 1: Focus Group Questions

Getting acquainted:

- How long have you lived in Littleton?
- Do you use the Reuben Hoar Library? If not, why not
- Do you use other libraries?
If so, where?
If so, why?

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word Library?

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear Reuben Hoar Library?

Is there something about the Library that is perfect right now?

The Trustees are considering expanding the Reuben Hoar Library. They are interested in your opinion of what should be available in an expanded building. What would you like?

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- Technology: access to Internet, electronic databases
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- Quiet study rooms, meeting spaces, display areas (arts)
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- community store, a café, other possibilities.

What would make the Reuben Hoar Library a better place to visit? What one change to improve the library would you make?

How do you see your information needs changing (for example: use computers, access from home, school, work, e-materials, and/or digital collections)?

We have talked about a wide range of issues today. Are there any other topics or concerns we haven't touched upon? Is there anything else about your own library experience you would like to share with the group?