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**A Report & Recommendations for the
Meredith Public Library
On Library Space Utilization
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The Meredith Public Library has arrived at a point where the physical plant is not adequate to meet either the modern requirements of a library or the modern standards for public building safety.

The simplistic solution is to build a new library on a different site in town. While this might be the optimum solution from a technical perspective, it disregards the historical attachment to the current facility, the town's financial burden of other recent municipal construction, and the fiscal realities of 2011.

I would recommend that a quick study be made of available land and the cost of recent construction of libraries generally similar to the needs of Meredith. This would allow for a reasonable comparison of the costs involved in upgrading the current facility to those of replacement. The potential for alternate use of the current building or availability of adjacent land/buildings should also be considered. This would also prepare the Trustees for the possibility of a donation of a library such as occurred in 1900. While this seems remote, it has recently happened in Hudson, NH.

The purpose of this report is to consider the utilization of space in the current building, driven immediately by safety inspections by the local Fire Department and the NH Fire Marshal's Office as well as operational shortcomings as library use patterns change.

There are no easy solutions and none without some drawbacks.

On first look, a 10,000 square foot library in a community of 6500 residents would seem generally adequate. This neglects the massive seasonal service population increases in a community with a tourism & recreation driven economy and the fact that the space is broken up into seven different levels, with an immense amount of space given over to hallways and stairways.

The conventional and symmetrical 1900 building was supplemented very creatively due to land space constraints and underground ledge with a 4000 square foot addition completed in 1988.

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The contents of libraries have also changed since that time when personal computers were a novelty and the internet was known only to the very tech savvy, libraries were considering the possibility of collecting new-fangled videocassettes and most audio music collections were 33 1/3 rpm records. How our patrons will adopt increased uses of virtual media such as e-books and downloadable as opposed to physical media music and video will affect library space needs in the coming years and decades. Being as flexible as possible in the tasking of space will make the future easier to cope with.

The nature of public buildings has changed too. The addition included a platform chairlift fitted in the stairway as a major means of complying with the Americans With Disabilities Act and otherwise giving access to patrons and employees who may be unable to negotiate stairs. The primary entrance off the tiny parking area is generally accessible, but the old main entrance with its many stairs is still frequently used by those coming from the street or municipal lot parking areas.

I am sure that the building complied with safety codes in 1988, too. I understand that the safety codes now being enforced will restrict occupancy in certain areas and require a sprinkler system to keep the old emergency staircase acceptable. Obtaining written documentation of the application of these codes is desirable, but changing codes and officials involved probably means that this is not forthcoming.

In general, I favor modern sprinkler systems in libraries, even recognizing that the cost of retrofitting an old building in an area that may have limited water pressure can be extreme. In this case, the staircase in question provides the required second means of egress to so many library areas, that not using them is not an option. Being allowed to sprinkler only that area is probably the best outcome that can be expected.

I understand that even with the sprinklered staircase, a maximum occupancy of 25 will be allowed in what is now the children's room.

Adding space by further addition to the building seems prohibited by the same restrictions which resulted in the design of the 1988 addition. It would be well to determine the planned future of adjacent buildings, especially the church. Is there any potential for sharing/renting space there?

It might be possible to add floor space by flooring over the balcony in the current YA & children's stack room. This would seem a terrible disruption of the historical design of the original building, and likely a very expensive process to add a small amount of floor space, and I would not recommend it.

An alternative to adding space is to remove certain functions to other, off-site locations, freeing space for other purposes. This has already been done in one area by removing the costume collection. Given the operational difficulties and additional staffing necessary to move core library functions off-site (e.g. to a branch facility or to create a separate

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children's library), I will not discuss this possibility further here. Three functions do seem candidates for moving off-site.

First would be the meeting/community room function. As most meetings are self-contained, needing little interaction with other parts of the building (excepting restrooms), the possibility of holding both library and non-library meetings at another site or sites must be considered. This would certainly create an inconvenience and extra work for library staff for library programs. It would remove a significant portion of the "library as focal point of community life" expressed in the library's vision statement. To the extent that library programs are designed to bring patrons into the building, it would be a total loss. Library programs held off-site will still provide the content and interaction to the public that is desired, but will run the risk of not being identified with the library. Many other libraries have to deal with using off-site locations for programs and meetings of significant size, and lessons can be learned in retaining the library connection from their experiences. This option would obviously free up a large amount of space in the bottom level current Function Room with minimal disruption of current operations and minimal cost to re-task this space.

The second function that could be moved off-site is the book donation & Friends book sale operation. To the extent that I presume that staff members peruse donations of books and other materials for items useful in the collection, this would require some staff time at the off-site location. If the off-site location were adequate, it would remove the need to move the sale material frequently. If a storefront site could be obtained, it might allow for processing and regular public sales as well as for the online sales now ongoing. This would certainly require increased Friends staffing. If the primary purpose is to raise money for the library, costs for the alternative site could render the operation useless. It might be possible to find a good storefront whose owners might find the tax-deductible donation of space desirable. It might also serve as a library outreach and a draw to the many traveling to or through Meredith that would never come to the library. This would not free much space, as the current operation already wants more, permanent space, and the space that it does use is far from desirable for other operations.

The third function to consider moving off-site is small but should require only money to accomplish. Get rid of the historical newspapers now stored in the basement near the HVAC equipment. This is terrible space from a preservation perspective for the newspapers. Preserve the content (digital imaging, although still a step-child of the traditional microfilm image preservation, presents itself as a nice option as you do not have other microfilm and equipment) and donate the actual newspapers to an organization that can preserve them or pay for a good preservation location elsewhere.

Depending on what space might be gained by removing functions, there are many possibilities for re-tasking space in the building.

In order to determine what options for re-tasking of space are possible, it is necessary that you bring in a structural engineer to assess the floor load capacities of each of the library's many floors. I can recommend someone if you wish. The normal load capacity

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of a library floor is 150 pounds per square foot of live load capacity. The blueprints, which you have, or other documents, may show the planned capacity, but in the older part of the building, 110 years of good use may have changed the reality. Other libraries have found it necessary to remove stacks from areas in which they had planned to add more. While deterioration and sag would seem more likely than a catastrophic failure under load, it is not a risk that can be taken. I doubt that library compact shelving is a helpful possibility here as, while it doubles the material that may be shelved in an area, the moving/closing shelves virtually eliminate browsing. They are far more applicable in an academic or archival facility. They also generally require 300 pounds per square foot of live load capacity.

I suggest exploring the possibility of moving the HVAC equipment into the boiler room. Consulting with a town fire inspector, I am advised that “in general” the NFPA codes allow HVAC equipment to share boiler room space – which you have plenty of. This would gain a bit of space, which may be useful (see below). This would need to be explored with your local inspectors both for any additional local requirements and for the specifics of your situation. This would require moving some ductwork if feasible at all, and will probably only be worthwhile if you need to replace your HVAC (which I understand may be needed) and if that space will be truly helpful. The “maintenance & storage” area on this level is still needed for those functions.

The space that you have gained in the former costume room is just begging to be used for something better than storing boxes of books. This would probably only be possible if a second means of egress can be provided. It appears on inspection that the wall towards the newspapers & HVAC is actually a series of brick support pillars with walls filled in between them. I did not get to examine the blueprints and am not qualified to determine the structural requirements, but the aforementioned structural engineer could. If it is possible to place a door in one of those wall spaces, it would provide access to the (soon to be sprinklered) stairs beyond the enclosed boiler room as a second means of egress. This is also why I raise the possibility of moving the HVAC. It would be necessary to check with your fire inspectors as to the acceptability of this space for low volume occupancy, such as staff offices or an ongoing book sale room. It would certainly need redecorating!

Depending on what functions remain in the building and whether the basement level can be made to support functions other than storage, the possibilities for re-tasking current public space vary widely. A couple of general thoughts:

- I am loathe to move the circulation desk from a location where both doors are generally observable and accessible;
- Unless there is a willingness to make the front door emergency egress only and force all patrons to come in & out the door off the parking lot, the traffic from the front door eliminates the possibility of combining room space or using it as a children’s room;
- The current children’s room would make a nice place for the public access computers, but it is too far removed from easy staff supervision and assistance. It could also make a nice teen retreat, but supervision again becomes a concern.

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Moving the children's room from the top level appears to be the first priority.

(Plan A) Moving the children's room into the current function/meeting room on the lowest level seems the easiest. Purchasing shelving on wheels would maximize the flexibility of the space, allowing for storytime use. The new addition stairwell provides secondary egress. Check code requirements for children's facilities partially below ground, but I suspect that the use would be allowed. The kitchen facilities are handy for crafts, etc. Other kitchen access may be annoying & the coat area just outside the room will probably need to be used for storage. YA could expand where it is and the current children's room (with the pit filled in and possibly the skylight removed) might be used for staff space. A drawback is that "off-duty" staff members are far removed from being called to assist in busy times

The current staff work space might be used for small meetings. Most other functions would not need to be moved and cost & disruption would be minimized.

A more radical concept would require a lot more moving & paradigm shifting, but would keep the meeting room. It would require continued radical weeding & thinning of the non-fiction collection and possibly shifting the "popular reading" non-fiction such as biographies to a separate area, depending on shelving space requirements.

(Plan B) Move the children's room to the current non-fiction stack room, maximizing flexible space for small groups with rolling shelving, but many programs would go to the meeting room. The current children's room, with pit and probably skylight removed becomes the non-fiction stack area. Remember the floor-load tests before this is considered! Detailed stack/aisle measurements would also be critical to planning such a move. Ideally, the J material on the balcony would fit into the new Children's room (probably on higher, wall shelving) and the balcony becomes the teen area. Alternately, the current children's room could be the staff work area, and the current work area would become the non-fiction stack area. Non-fiction behind the circulation desk – what an early Twentieth Century concept that is!

Another variation provides more children's room space than B, but retains some meeting capacity.

(Plan C) Move the children's room to the current meeting room and staff work space to the current children's room as in Plan A. Move the computer stations to the current staff area and the AV collection shares space with the reduced non-fiction collection in the current non-fiction room or goes behind the circulation desk. The current AV/computer room gets flexible seating & tables (folding/stacking) and serves as a medium sized meeting room – which could overflow into the lobby – never blocking front door egress lanes. There could be a considerable amount of meeting noise or business & traffic noise into the meeting area. When no meeting is in progress, this would allow extra seating for wireless/laptop use.

If the costume room can be converted to office space or staff retreat space or quiet study space, it would open new options. If usable for book sales, it adds a service area, but no space that will relieve other pressures.

The Director's Office and the Children's Librarian's office could retain their uses, or become private study/work areas.

I anticipate that the eventual layout will be some combination of ideas – and very probably not a permanent fix, but rather what will work for a few years. Developing these ideas into an actual layout plan will take precise measurements and planning. I hope that these assessments and ideas will serve as a catalyst for your decision-making.

I thank Erin for her time during my visit and I would be pleased to discuss further planning possibilities if it would be helpful.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thomas A. Ladd".

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