<u>Introduction</u>

In July of 2013, the Meredith Public Library Board of Trustees created the Master Planning Committee to assess what changes may be needed to be made to the library space in order to meet the current and future needs of the town of Meredith. This decision was based upon the Long Range Plan of the Meredith Public Library[1] and a number of maintenance issues that had to be resolved.[2]

The committee was formed from within the community with the final group consisting of a diverse cross section of the community: A doctor, graphic designer, high school student, teacher; individuals who had lived in the area for many years and those who had just moved in. The final group consisted of Patricia Browher, Kimberly Dixon, Beverly Heyduk, Amy LaFavre, Dr. Jonathan Lee, Glenna Lee, Elizabeth Rohdenburg and Gage Wheeler. The trustees participated as rotating, non-voting members on the committee, so that their intimate knowledge of the current operation of the Library and their vision could be utilized without biasing the committee's findings. Erin Apostolos, the Library Director was also active with the group. Full Circle Consulting was brought in to help facilitate the process with professional consultants Amy Lockwood and Terry Plum.

The charge of the committee was to research community services in Meredith and learn what other libraries in similar communities had done with regard to renovations, remodels and new buildings. Also, they were tasked with discussing existing services and possible future services with staff members. Finally, they were asked to solicit opinions about the future of the library from the community through surveys and public meetings.

<u>Town of Meredith</u>

The library is a central community institution and for this reason it needs to accurately reflect its population. According to the 2000 census, the median age in Meredith was 42. The 2010 census saw it rise to 48.7. This increase in median age was accompanied by a drop in those under twenty from nearly 25% in 2000 to 20% in 2010, and an increase of those age sixty and over from 22% in 2000 to over 28% in 2010. What might these demographic changes mean for the future of the Meredith Public Library and the services it provides?

Meredith is also home to a number of seasonal residents. There is often three times as much traffic at the library during the summer months, as well as the need for more programming.

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[1] See Appendix 1: Long Range Plan
[2] See Appendix 2: Development of MPL Master Plan

The town of Meredith is home to a number of community and non-profit institutions and organizations, including the Lakeland and Inter-Lakes Schools, the Community Center, the Senior Center, the Historical Society, the Winnipesaukee Playhouse, as well as Rotary, Lions, and Altrusa. These institutions provide services to the town of Meredith, and one goal of the MPC was to identify areas where the library could support these institutions, but not overlap their services. An assessment of the current services in Meredith is included below.

Meredith Public Library

The Meredith Public Library was first opened in 1901 and went through a major renovation in 1988. It is located on Main Street, which sees heavy traffic particularly during the summer months. According to the 2013 Town Report, the library has 5,583 registered patrons. The same report showed the total inventory of the library to be 41,144 items with annual circulations of 88,055 items. The library is open five days a week: 9-8 Tuesday through Thursday, 12-5 Friday, and 9-2 Saturday.

The library is administered by seven elected Library Trustees and has seven full-time equivalent staff members. It has an active Friends group who organize fundraising, support the library's subscription to Ancestry.com, museum passes, workshops, and events for all ages. They also support staff development, maintain the library garden and provide decorations for the library during the various holidays.

The library offers a variety of programming for all ages. It offers recreational reading opportunities including story time and summer reading programs, and adult book groups. The library offers a number of activities that are not centered on books: LEGO creation time, movie nights, genealogy workshops, writing groups, and knitting clubs. The library also helps the community by providing one-on-one technology assistance.

Master Plan Committee Research Report

In recent years, a number of public libraries in New Hampshire have undergone significant changes. As the Master Plan Committee considered its recommendations for Meredith, it was determined there would be value in visiting some of these libraries and conducting interviews with those involved in the process. Seven libraries were selected with three serving communities of comparable size to Meredith, three of smaller sizes and one that served a significantly larger community.[3] The publication by the American Library Association, "Confronting the Future" guided the semi-structured interviews. The four dimensions it focuses on are: physical to virtual libraries, individual to community libraries, collection to creation libraries, and portal to archival

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[3] See Appendix 3: Library Visits for individual interviews and in-depth summary.

libraries. Each library exists between these particular extremes, and how it serves its community may change over time.4

It was important to focus the interview questions on the needs that were of particular concern to Meredith as they had been articulated at the start of the research, including ease of access, well-ventilated private bathrooms, and sufficient parking space. How space was allocated was important: space for teens, sufficient program space for children, space for studying and meeting, makerspaces, computer spaces and dedicated staff space.

Each of the visited libraries had to determine whether a renovation, remodel or completely new building was the most advantageous for its situation and community, and each had different budgets and timeframes. The costs for renovations and additions ranged from $110,000 to $1.8 million, while new buildings ranged in cost from $1.2 million to $3.8 million. The sources of funding also varied significantly from issuing bonds to individual donations and fundraising, with differing degrees of autonomy based on how much of the funding came directly from the taxpayers.

As noted in "Confronting the Future," digital as well as physical presence is of importance. A modern building should facilitate high speed access to Wi-Fi, supply electrical outlets for mobile devices and provide sufficient public access computers. Elevators and as few floors as possible are recommended in newly constructed buildings.

How and when a community could access the library space was important to new and renovated buildings. Libraries in Gilford and Moultonborough have meeting space available even when the library is closed. Determining the policies for using library meeting spaces was also important. Is it restricted to library activities or can local non-profits also use the space? Would there be some spaces that could be rented out to local businesses?

The activities of the library, current programming and future needs of patrons determine how best to utilize the space and should be considered when working through a change to the physical space. Makerspaces can take up a fair amount of space if they are highly technical and even knitter groups need a small dedicated space outside the stacks. Is the library going to house a large collection of local archives? Will it move away from a large dedicated non-fiction collection to a number of database subscriptions? The complete report and the accompanying interviews and site surveys available in Appendix 3 will offer some insight into possible directions to take and also potential pitfalls to avoid if renovations or a new structure are to be considered. Determining a cost-benefit analysis was a significant step for each library.

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4 The complete publication of "Confronting the Future" is available in Appendix 4.

Community Services in Meredith

The Community Center offers public computers, meeting spaces, study spaces and teen programming however, hours of the community center meeting spaces are limited particularly during the summer. Institutions such as the Winnipesaukee Playhouse, Shield Comics, the Senior Center (closed after the research subcommittee's evaluation) and the Historical Society all offer a variety of programs many of which could be potential partners in library programming.[5]

Discussion with various community services showed the following:
- There is no central calendar or announcement service for all of the programs. The MPC speculated that such an information service would be a good role for the library.
- Teen services at schools and the Community Center seemed primarily focused on sports with a general lack of space for socializing for this group.
- The Meredith Historical Society is active and entirely volunteer-run, but it has limited public availability and funding. A partnership between the historic society and the library, like that which exists in Laconia, might be a possibility.
- Computer availability was assessed. The library has eight public access computers running Windows 8. The Community Center has 13 public laptops running Windows XP. The library has a dedicated network administrator, while the Community Center uses the town network administrator.[6] A computer lab at the library as well as circulating laptops might make more sense, particularly if the library were located nearer the Community Center. Finally, spaces for public meetings were considered. The Community Center offers different sized meeting rooms, but fees and availability create some barriers to usage.

Staff Interviews

The staff of MPL have daily interactions with the library building and its patrons and the committee felt it was important to solicit their opinions. The staff noted that different groups of patrons use the library at different times. In general, seniors were the primary users in the morning, with children and teens dominating the space between three and five, and relatively few patrons after five o'clock. Uses include participating in programming, leisure reading, computer access, and access to Wi-Fi.

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[5] Community Service Assessment is included in Appendix 6: Outreach Committee Report, and it goes into greater detail of the services currently provided in Meredith by a variety of institutions.
[6] A more complete survey of the town's services is available in Appendix 6: Outreach Committee Report.

A number of common threads came out of the staff interviews.[7] The staff felt that some of the issues that the library faces today and in the future would be very difficult to overcome in our current building. Problems of access, parking, dedicated program spaces for children and adults, as well as a teen space would all be difficult to fit into the current space. A computer lab and bathrooms in the children's space would require a new space. The staff unanimously felt that new construction would be the best means of meeting the challenges of the future. They also noted that many of the costs associated with maintaining a historical building would further complicate any attempt to renovate in the current space.

Community Survey

The Master Plan Committee attempted to reach as broad a portion of the town of Meredith as possible, both library users and non-users.[8] This was done through promotions including posters, entries in the newsletter, and in-person requests both at the library and at presentations at local institutions. Paper surveys were made available at a number of locations around the town and were distributed to students at the schools.

There were 702 responses to the survey, approximately 12% of the town's population. Approximately 80% of respondents have a library card.[9] Just over 30% of respondents used the library almost every week, and 10% have never used the library.

In general, survey respondents indicated a desire for more programs and greater space. Lack of teen and juvenile programming was viewed as a reason why some people did not use the library space. Respondents suggested interesting ideas for new and expanded library services.[10]

Approximately 44% of respondents noted that current library hours are sufficient. Meanwhile 12% cited lack of convenient hours as a reason for not visiting the library more often. While there were a fair number of suggestions for changes in the hours of service, the most popular (54% of respondents) indicated that some hours on Monday would be helpful.

Many who took the survey across a wide spectrum of ages noted that more should be done with regard to mobile devices. They suggested both help sessions for using these devices and having devices available within the library.

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[7] See Appendix 7: Summary of Staff Interviews
[8] Appendix 9: Survey Summary gives a complete analysis of the surveys.
[9] All percentages based on those who answered the question exclusively. The graphs in Appendix 10: Survey Results also document those who skipped a given question.
[10] See Appendix 9: Survey Summary for complete list of service suggestions.

Among most respondents there was a general sense that the library needs more space, especially parking. Lack of parking was cited by 47% of respondents as a major reason they do not visit the library. Respondents desired increased space for socializing, programming, studying and maintaining the collection. There were differing opinions on whether large function spaces were entirely necessary, or if greater collaboration with the Community Center would be a better way to address this issue.

Improved accessibility was cited as important as well. Either elevators or having the library on a single floor were both seen as advantageous. Virtual access was also considered. Many respondents appreciated that they could access some of the library's resources virtually and wondered if this access might counter some of the future need for space as the collection becomes more digital.

Among adult survey respondents, 27% felt that the library should do only what is necessary to be in compliance to keep the building open (the children's survey did not include the question). Of the adults, 48% showed a preference for maintaining the current location with expanded and renovated space, and 18% preferred a completely new building at a different location. This analysis was further broken down between different age groups and users and frequency of use.[11]

At this point in the process, costs have not been determined with regards to maintaining the current location versus building at a new location. Once these costs were known it would be important to again solicit public opinion.

Public Input Sessions

There were five public input sessions: March 6, March 26, April 9, April 22, and April 29, 2014.[12] Some of the major issues noted by participants in these sessions were lack of space and anticipated changes in demand for space as content is increasingly digital. Questions were posed regarding potential future locations, whether land around the library could be purchased for expansion, and the costs associated with renovating the current building versus creating a new building. Interestingly, the majority of survey respondents believed the current space should be maintained while those attending the public sessions left with the opinion that a new building would be necessary. Educating the public is important throughout this process, and as the various costs associated with both options becomes evident, it will be important to reach as large an audience as possible with this information as well.

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[11] See Appendix 9: Survey Summary.
[12] Appendix 11: Public Input Sessions provides notes for each session.

Conclusion

The library space faces a number of issues. The MPC, based on its research, agrees that the building must be brought up to code and numerous accessibility issues must be resolved. Ideally the building would be on a single level or have an elevator between levels. The current stacks, furniture and circulation desks must all be made accessible. The entire building should have access to Wi-Fi, a high number of easily accessible electrical outlets, and furniture that allows for ease of usage with mobile devices.   Parking should be addressed either by purchasing areas around the library and converting it to parking or through moving to a new building. A more convenient drive-through book drop would also be of value.

From the staff interviews it was determined that noise reducing glass for teen and children's area would allow for more active programming and socializing without disturbing other library visitors. The children's area would benefit from child-sized furniture and an easily accessible bathroom. The staff needs its own work areas separated from the main circulation desk or glassed-in to reduce noise. A dedicated staff break room and bathroom would also be improvements.

Inputs from both the staff and community showed there was value in a variety of meeting spaces from small tutoring rooms to a large meeting space able to support up to 75 people. Also, separate spaces for socializing and quiet study are important. An Internet cafe space for socializing and technology use would also be of great value as well as a computer lab for programming. Ideally, the library would be closer to the schools and Community Center to promote ease of access to these user groups and to allow for more collaborative programming. Obviously this would only be possible if a new building were constructed.

Respondents to the survey agree that the library needs more space for its activities, more accessibility, and expanded parking. But how to accomplish that, in their opinion, is not clear. Most survey respondents value the current building but desire a renovated and expanded building with more parking. Citizens who attended the public input sessions asked the cost of purchasing land around the current library building to expand parking, to renovate the building to meet safety code, and to make it more accessible. They also asked the cost comparison of constructing an addition to meet space needs versus constructing a new one-level building on a new site. The Master Plan Committee recommends that the trustees determine this cost difference as their next step.