

Astoria Public Library Building Project FAQ

Introduction: 21st century library services

Traditionally, libraries are associated with books and reading, yet modern libraries are more than buildings where books are stored and loaned. They are places where citizens of all ages and economic circumstances may meet, collaborate, and access resources for lifelong learning. Robust and vibrant libraries have the capacity to meet current and developing trends: increasingly, libraries offer creative spaces for collaboration, dedicated space for early childhood literacy, dedicated space for teens, and a variety of community gathering spaces. Ultimately, 21st century libraries are designed to be accessible and welcoming to all.

What has changed since 1965-the year the current building was designed-leading to the need for a new or renovated library building?

Since 1965, demand for library services-e.g. circulation, programs, meeting space, and public computer use-has grown steadily, outpacing the library's ability to provide services from a physical standpoint. The existing building's capacity is no longer adequate. Furthermore, never having been comprehensively renovated, it does not meet current building codes.

The *Building Program for the Astoria Public Library* for the current structure, completed by John D. Henderson of Berkeley, California in March, 1965, sheds light on some of the age-related problems that could be solved by a new or renovated library.

- **ADA access:** Planned before the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the current building lacks ADA access. The mezzanine has a stairwell, but no elevator. Those who cannot manage the stairwell cannot access services located on the mezzanine.
- **Electrical capacity:** In the 1965 plan, electrical outlets were intended for janitorial equipment and office machines. The building's designers did not anticipate that the public would need access to outlets. However, in today's world, many library users take advantage of Wi-Fi services and require outlets to charge laptops and other digital devices.
- **Natural light:** 2013 survey respondents repeatedly asked for natural light. Similarly, Henderson's Building Program recommends "glass walls... on the north side" and "high transom windows... for the west and south sides"(p. 26). As built, the library's windows provide limited natural light.
- **Dedicated space for children ages birth-5:** Current research identifies the ages of birth through five as the early childhood literacy years. During this period, children prepare to enter school ready to read and learn, and they benefit from access to a wide array of literacy materials and programs. However, as Henderson defines children as "the years from pre-school through the eighth grade"(p. 12), the early literacy age group was not considered in the planning of the current space.
- **Spending time in the library:** In the 1965 program, Henderson wrote that most borrowers spend "only enough time in the library to return books, browse briefly and check out something new and interesting"(p. 2). However, in the 2013 survey, teens and adults indicated a preference for a library space conducive to longer visits. Parents who bring children to the library typically spend half an hour or more. Finally, today's new libraries are designed as community centers that have other amenities, such as cafés, encouraging longer visits.

Why does the Building Program indicate that the Astoria Public Library needs 18,200 sf?

In the 2013 Astoria Public Library Renovation Study, the city received feedback from more than 800 people about their library needs. According to the study, Astorians want better collections, meeting space, space for children, quiet zones, and the use of new technology. In January, 2014, the City Council approved the Astoria Public Library Renovation Study, Part One, Needs Assessment and Two, the Building Program, and the recommendation of the Library Board. To serve current and projected community needs, the report “calls for a Library of 18,122 gross square feet and assumes that 70% of the total square footage will be useable for library services and functions.” To view the Astoria Public Library Renovation Study, go to www.astorialibrary.org.

Could renovating the current building serve current and projected needs?

It is possible to renovate the current building. To meet the Building Program of 18,122 square feet with 70% of square footage useable for services, the footprint of the building would increase through expansion into the parking lot, expansion to the east, and/or consideration of a multi-level library.

It should be noted that single level libraries facilitate the function of the building and allow for greater ease of use. According to a *Libraries for All* memo issued by the Seattle Public Library, the reliance on functional relationships, the flow of materials through the building, direct supervision of all public areas, and security for patrons and staff are considerations affecting the efficiency of the single level library. Multi-level libraries incur additional capital and operating costs for stairways, elevators, restrooms on each floor, and additional staffing.

Using the existing building's basement adds a second floor, creating the challenges noted above. Furthermore, in the 2013 survey, a majority of respondents expressed a desire for windows and natural light. The basement is entirely below grade, adding expenses to mitigate bringing natural lighting to this area. Other scenarios are being reviewed to determine if expansion of the existing library onto adjacent properties are desirable options.

What factors will be considered when looking into renovating the existing building versus constructing a new building at Heritage Square?

- **Square footage:** As described above, the Building Program approved by City Council recommends a building area of 18,122 and assumes that 70% of the total square footage will be useable to serve current and projected community needs. Heritage Square is a publicly owned space that has the physical capacity to deliver a single story 18,200 square feet library. As stated earlier, other scenarios are being reviewed to expand the existing library building to provide additional space. These options meet or get closer to the recommended building area.
- **Location:** Both sites are located in the downtown core and could serve in varying degrees to the revitalization of the Duane Street corridor.
- **City Council goals:** The Astoria City Council has established a goal to review the possibility of housing on the Heritage Square site. This review was initially being conducted concurrent with the library study to determine how a new library could be developed on this site.
- **Costs:** There are a number of variables which determine a square foot cost for renovation and new construction. A revised cost estimate that shows the various options for the existing library will be prepared in Spring 2016 and compared to a cost estimate prepared for Heritage Square.

Who will decide whether to renovate/expand the existing library or to construct a new building?

The Astoria City Council will be the decision making body on this issue.