Rochester Public Library

Master Plan Report

August 15, 2025

MSRDesign

BUILDING ANALYTICS

KRAUS-ANDERSON®

PATHWAY GROUP

SNG RESEARCH

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Members of the Rochester and Olmsted County Community

Library Mission and Vision

Vision
A strong and equitable community

Mission
Welcoming all to connect and learn

Core Values
As part of the City of Rochester we adhere to the city's organizational values (Customer Focus, Respect, Integrity, Safety, and Excellence), and we also affirm the following:

WE CARE
Welcoming **E**nvironment
Committed to Inclusivity
Access for all
Respect intellectual freedom
Exceptional library service

Welcoming Environment - We are committed to providing safe and welcoming spaces. Our policies and practices ensure safety, our physical spaces are well-maintained, and all library spaces are inclusive and non-judgmental places to gather or reflect. We care about each other, our customers, the community, and what we do.

Committed to Inclusivity - We honor diversity and are inclusive. We seek to represent all people in our collections, events, services, workforce and other areas. We are committed to collaboration with community members and partners to ensure we reflect the diversity of our entire community.

Access for All - We are committed to providing basic library services at no charge and serving all users fairly and equitably. We harness the talents and resources of our vibrant community and connect individuals in order to ensure everyone can achieve individual and community dreams.

Respect Intellectual Freedom – We are committed to intellectual freedom and the need for the library collection, services, and events to represent many different points of view. Individuals are responsible for making their own choices regarding appropriateness of materials, and parents/guardians are responsible for the choices made for their children. We are committed to providing prompt, objective, confidential, and knowledgeable responses to requests for assistance.

Exceptional Library Service - We are committed to providing quality library service with a smile. We embrace creativity by being innovative, open to new ideas, and willing to try new things to serve our community better. Community members can trust the library is a place they can ask any question, find materials for learning or enjoyment, connect with others, and use technology that will enhance their lives.

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The recommendations contained within this master plan are informed by multiple sources, including regional, national, and global library trends related to the role of the next-generation library; published plans for the growth and evolution of the City of Rochester and Olmsted County; internal and external stakeholder input (e.g., library staff and leadership, city and county staff and leadership, community leaders, community at large); assessment of existing services and where they are provided; and assessment of the political and financial landscape the library operates within.

Taken together, these sources paint the picture of an organization that is ready to continue to commit itself to the community's needs and to the city's and county's goals, and to position itself to embrace future opportunities and meet future challenges as the city and county grow and evolve. As such, recommendations range from overarching organizational needs (e.g., to position Rochester Public Library's staff to design and deliver the services that best support the needs of its community) to specific issues (e.g., where and how services are delivered).

The Role of the Next-Generation Library

Now, more than ever, public libraries offer inspiration, creativity, engagement, and community involvement as they support both formal and informal learning opportunities, digital inclusion (bridging digital divides in technology access, learning, and mastery), and building formal and informal partnerships to extend services and reach.

Libraries should push boundaries, encourage experimentation, and introduce customers to the possibilities and potential of technology and collaboration. Next-generation public libraries play an integral role in the daily lives of community members as places for:

- Lifelong learning and literacy
- Celebrating and appreciating language and culture
- Promotion of the joy of reading
- Active community engagement
- Creativity and innovation
- Collaboration and exploration
- Facilitation of digital Inclusion

Rochester Public Library's current building opened in 1995, an era of service with less emphasis on programs and technology.

The future of public libraries includes the following realities:

Digital is on the rise

- More materials will be available in digital formats.
- Collection of physical materials will stay at current levels in the short term. In the longer term, decline of physical materials will make space for other vital services

Access to spaces and technologies for content creation is essential

- Communities need access to—and knowledge of—the tools and literacies required to thrive in the next generation library.
- AI tools will continue to evolve and be incorporated into creative endeavors and education.

Adaptability is critical

- Service needs will continue to shift and evolve exponentially—and staff must, too.
- Library buildings must be easily adaptable as services and technology evolve.

Services must be hyper-local

- Customization is key. Libraries need to reflect and respond to their individual communities' needs.

Partnerships are an integral part of the service equation

- Colocation and/or robust collaborative programming will be necessary to deliver what communities need to thrive.

With new technology available to the public and new spaces that stress community and collegiality, public libraries are embracing the challenges and opportunities of evolving from book-centric institutions focused on collecting to becoming people-centric institutions focused on creativity, inclusion, and discovery.

Themes from stakeholder input

This plan's recommendations are based upon input gathered from internal and external stakeholders and planning documents that provide context for the vision for the city and region.

Demographic data, the City of Rochester's "Vision 2050" and "Planning to Succeed: Rochester Comprehensive Plan 2040" documents, Olmsted County's "General Land Use Plan 2045," and the Destination Medical Center plans all provided important context regarding the significant growth and changes anticipated for Rochester. These plans describe the vision for Rochester as a global destination for health and wellness, a place that offers a high quality of life, an exciting and vibrant place focused on growth and innovation, and a place that is welcoming and diverse. Given the central role the next-generation library will play in is achieving each of these aims, questions posed to stakeholders were geared toward determining how the library would support the goals for a high quality life, vibrant and inclusive community, and a place for all to thrive.

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City of Rochester Vision statement
Rochester is a City that cares. Where all people are treated with dignity and respect. Where residents, employees, and visitors enjoy a high quality of life. Where business and industry thrive, and where the land and environment are renewed and sustained for the benefit of all. It is a welcoming and diverse community.

The community provided input through in-person and digital engagement and outreach methods, including conversations and "dot-voting" on imagery of next-generation libraries from across the country, community conversations facilitated through a "Co-design" project, one-on-one phone interviews with key community stakeholders, and a robust survey. Internal input included focus groups with Friends of the Library and the RPL Foundation and workshops with library leaders and staff members.

Each round of engagement built upon the findings of the prior round to uncover specific needs and ultimately narrow the focus of the master plan recommendations to respond to consistent themes:

- The community greatly supports the library, even among non-users (88% of survey respondents strongly agree there is value in having library resources available to the community, and 73% would support additional funding for RPL even if it resulted in a tax increase).
- Many residents are not aware of all the library's current or potential offerings and services.
- The downtown location presents access challenges for a significant number of community members (46% citing adequate parking near the library entry and 42% citing the cost of parking).
- As the city has grown, population centers have become weighted to north and south of the city. Across all community engagement platforms, the desire for branch libraries was consistently stated.
- There is little apparent appetite for a complete transformation of the downtown library building among many city leaders and elected officials. However, a refresh that would improve access and align the library with 21st-century needs is acknowledged to be highly impactful and supported by most community members (73% supporting additional funding for RPL; 77% commenting on improvements to the library).
- There is opportunity to better align the library with goals and aspirations of the city and county leaders' stated goals for the community to position itself as a key partner in community growth.

Survey input: "Having a downtown location is vital, not only for residents of all ages and families, but also for Mayo patients"

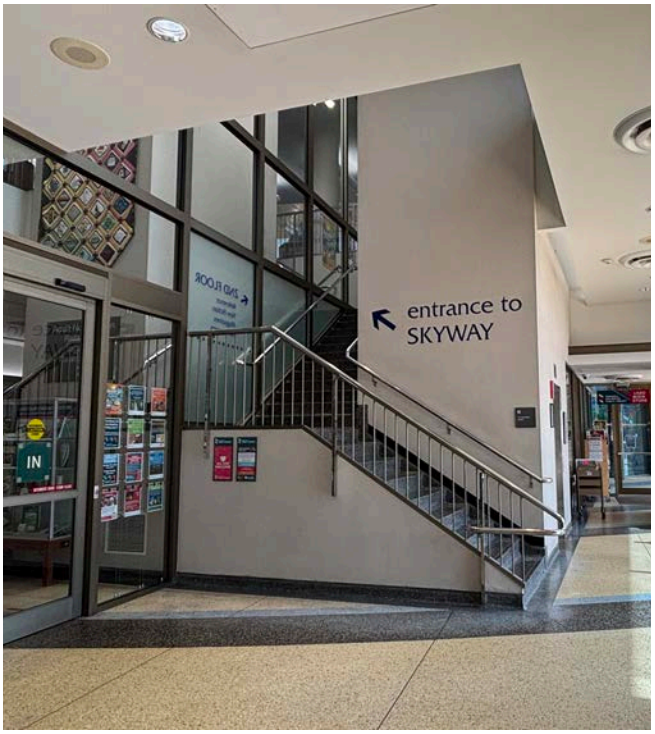
Library staff and leadership provided critical input throughout the process, and a steering committee made up of city staff, library staff, and library board members guided the analysis of our findings and shape of the final recommendations.

Themes from building conditions study

The interior and exterior of the existing library building have been well-maintained and are in good condition. In addition to continuing routine maintenance of the building, recommended issues to address include:

- Roof over the skyway may need to be repaired/replaced given signs of water intrusion within the interior spaces.
- The library was constructed in 1995 to meet current building codes and the Americans with Disability Act (ADA). In recent years, these standards have been revised to include larger clear floor areas and opening spaces to accommodate more widespread use of motorized mobility devices. MSR Design recommends adjusting existing spaces (especially entrances, vertical circulation, and restrooms) to comply with these updated ADA standards (while not specifically required for compliance).
- Existing elevators are original and require modernization. Given that the passenger elevators are too small to accommodate a stretcher, the design team recommends enlarging them.
- Rochester Public Library is transitioning to a renewable geothermal thermal energy network which is scheduled to come online in 2025, eliminating the need for chiller and cooling tower replacements.

The building is well-maintained but needs modernizing.



The main entry is difficult to navigate and requires updates.

Financial + Political Landscape

While there is broad recognition of the Rochester Public Library as a valued community resource, the current political and philanthropic climate is not yet primed to support major capital investment. Stakeholders see potential for RPL to be a central hub for learning, culture, and community connection, but significant groundwork is needed to build political will, strengthen relationships with city and county leadership, and position the library as a key part of Rochester's long-term vision. The Library and its Library Foundation must develop a strategic initiative and capacity to inform and engage potential donors by raising RPL's profile as a worthwhile and critically important institution deserving of private funding to complement its public funding. Until this political alignment and philanthropic readiness are established, pursuing funding for major projects and capital initiatives will remain challenging.

Survey input: "The city has recently invested a lot in improving the parks and recreation opportunities in town. It is time that we also invest in the public library services, which are available year-round regardless of weather and provide so many more community benefits and essential services. A library provides not just access to information and resources on an equitable basis, but it is also a gathering space and the heart of our community, something neither the Internet nor Community Ed nor Rec Centers can provide."

RPL provides opportunity to engage with a variety of literacies. Examples include a Seed Library and educational programs.

Summary of recommendations

Based on an assessment of the most current and applicable trends, community needs as understood through robust engagement, and the sources referenced above, Rochester Public Library (RPL) should provide community-centered services that:

- Add to the continued vitality of Rochester in a welcoming environment where community members feel empowered and enlightened by their learning experiences.
- Encourage lifelong literacy and learning through traditional and innovative services that accommodate multiple literacies and respond to specific customer needs.
- Position the library as an active node in residents' daily lives where people can connect with one another and work collaboratively, as well as individually.
- Provide flexible, physical spaces that support community interaction, collaboration, collections, and content creation and sharing.
- Support business and career success through resources and collaborative spaces.
- Serve a key role in the social service network by providing space for training, partners, and private meetings.

To achieve these goals, an overarching aim is to develop and organize the RPL staff and its leadership to position the library as a transformative institution in partnership with city and county governments and other local institutions.

Accordingly, the planning team has organized recommendations into four categories:

Identity: Raise the library's profile in the community, and, critically, with city and county leadership.

Leadership: Foster a culture of innovation and transformation and develop strong leaders for the challenges ahead. Align city and county goals and strengthen the partnerships with RPL Library Foundation and Friends of the Library to achieve the library's service goals.

Operations: Review and revise the library's organizational structure, collections management, technology, and programming to respond to future needs.

Facilities: Expand library services throughout the city to improve access for all and address access issues to—and within—the downtown library.

Each recommendation includes a summary of the anticipated impact (the "why"), ideas for implementation, examples from other libraries for inspiration, and where applicable, rough-order-of-magnitude (ROM) costs to achieve the recommendation.

The planning team has included recommendations that fall outside a typical master plan's purview to illustrate the full opportunity of a revitalized Rochester Public Library. Suggested next steps will guide holistic progress.

Stakeholder Engagement

Engagement Summary

7
Community Events Attended

1,145+
Participants

3
Staff Engagement Sessions

10
Stakeholder Interviews

4,517
Survey Responses

7
Co-designers

4
Co-design Sessions

Library Leadership + Staff Engagement

Past studies for the library started with an assumption that physically expanding the downtown library building was necessary. The planning team has deliberately grounded this master plan's process and recommendations in the community's needs and desires for its library—now and in the future. This approach will ensure that the library is retooled in direct service to its community and as a means to build support for recommended service and building environment improvements (in both services and the built environment) from the ground up and, importantly, from the elected officials that must approve and fund them.

The planning team gathered input from both internal and external stakeholders and utilized a variety of engagement methods with the goal of expanding participation. The team conducted three rounds of engagement, as follows:

- Round 1: Visioning to establish long-term aspirations and identify overarching community needs the library may be able to address through its services.
- Round 2: Testing support and excitement around multiple services and programs that could be offered to support the collective vision.
- Round 3: Gathering more specific feedback to hone the final recommendations.

To ensure often-underrepresented voices were also represented, By Design led a "Community Co-design" process. The full report of By Design's findings is included in the Appendix.

More detail regarding the stakeholder input can be found in the Appendix.

Library Leadership & Staff Engagement
Three iterative workshops with library leaders and three iterative workshops with staff members were conducted during this study. Each round of conversations built upon the prior conversations, starting with broad themes and generally narrowing focus as the recommendations for necessary improvements became more evident.

Session #1: What is your vision for the future library?
During an interactive workshop, library staff reflected on their vision for the future of the library. The following priorities emerged from the work:

- Improve access to the library.
- Adapt services and programs to align with community interests.
- Continue to be a space for belonging and connection and set a welcoming tone for the rest of the city.
- Be recognized as a vital community asset.

Staff in-service day engagement activities.

Session #2: How can the library support the community's vision?

Library staff reviewed the community's input from the visioning sessions regarding needs, barriers for access, and opportunities for a future library. During a discussion centered on how the library can support that vision, the following themes emerged:

- Increase accessibility (both getting to the library and once inside the library).
- Expand library services outside downtown.
- Embrace opportunities for partnerships with community organizations.
- Embrace diversity (in staff, collections, programming).

Session #3: What do expanded services look like?

The final session involved considering what collections, services, and programming would have the greatest impact at a satellite location. Library staff are enthusiastic that satellite locations will provide opportunities to serve more of the community and make access to library services easier. Conclusions drawn from this session include:

- Locate satellites in areas that can be reached via public transportation with access to free parking.
- Satellite locations should accommodate picking up and dropping off materials, children's activities, and access to community partners.
- Spaces should be highly adaptable to allow for a wide range of activities.
- Satellite locations could have access to green space for programming, which the community desires but is not possible at the downtown location.
- Financial sustainability is a priority, so operations can continue if the pilot is successful in improving access to library services.

RPL staff made "Zines" to inform visioning during this study.

Library Partners Stakeholder Engagement

Foundation & Friends

As part of the community engagement process, we met with the leadership and boards of the Friends of RPL and the RPL Foundation, key library staff, Foundation staff, and key board members to understand the relationship between the Foundation and the library, current funding plans, and past philanthropic support. We also spoke with two peer foundations doing similar work to gain perspective on best practices. These conversations highlighted the strengths of the Friends and Foundation, as well as opportunities to deepen alignment with RPL's mission, expand fundraising capacity, and strengthen their role in advancing the library's future goals.

While the Rochester Public Library Foundation has a long history of successful fundraising, including securing major gifts, building a multi-million-dollar endowment for an organization of their size, contributions and new gifts have slowed in recent years. Revenues, individual giving, and major donor activity have not kept pace with past performance, and the Foundation's fundraising growth has leveled off.

Strengths

- Friends funding goes to support the library directly with relatively consistent funding.
- RPL is a giving community especially in the social service areas.
- RPL has a healthy endowment started by the Mayo Clinic and 3-5% goes to the library each year.
- History shows strong philanthropic support for the library.

Opportunities

The Rochester Public Library Foundation's strong reputation provides a solid base, but lapses in donor engagement highlight the need to reinvigorate support and strengthen its role as a key library partner.

- Reengage and cultivate past major donors.
- Expand outreach to new philanthropic audiences.
- Increase visibility of the Foundation's impact through targeted marketing.
- Strengthen advocacy efforts with community leaders and decision-makers.
- Develop campaigns that showcase the library's value and community impact.

Outreach revealed mixed perceptions about the strength of RPL's philanthropic community, underscoring the need for a feasibility study or fundraising roadmap to assess capacity, clarify opportunities, and guide a sustainable giving strategy.

The Friends used books sales contribute funding to RPL.

Key Stakeholders

As part of the community engagement process, eleven key stakeholders were interviewed by phone. The stakeholders were selected by RPL and reflect the civic and political leadership of Rochester. These conversations identified the following strengths and opportunities for RPL:

Strengths

- Rochester Public Library is a valued community resource.
- Library staff are held in high regard.
- Children's services are essential and excellent.
- RPL strives to be an active center for the community.

Opportunities

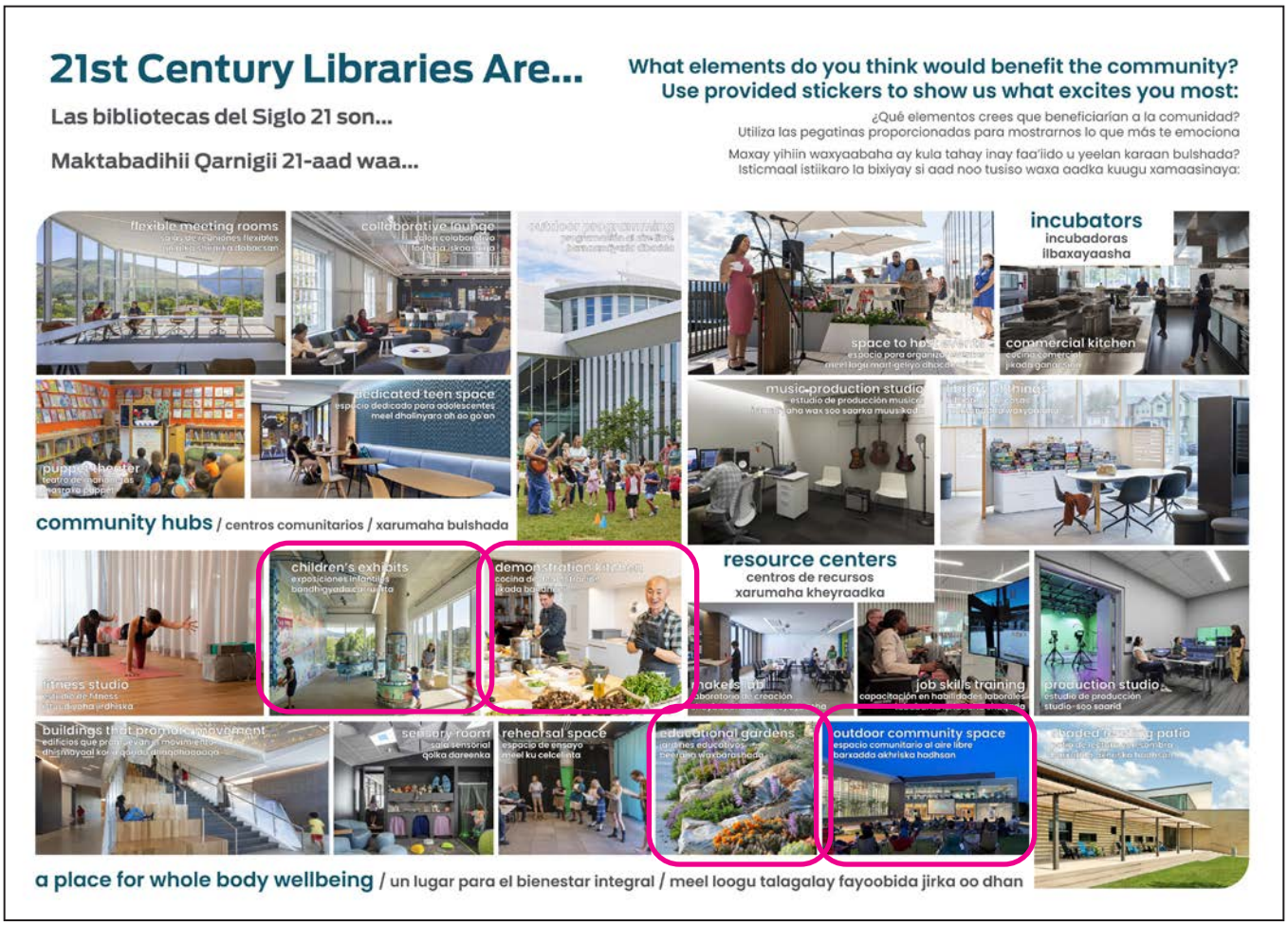
- Rethinking the current building needs in terms of access and spatial allocation.
- Building broader community support for RPL through well-developed communications and marketing strategies.
- Conducting more extensive neighborhood and newcomer outreach.
- Creating better access to RPL to meet the city's need for more library facilities, mobile access, and colocations.
- Developing a plan that addresses community needs and community growth.
- Supporting downtown growth and addressing access issues to RPL in terms of parking, traffic, and construction over next several years.
- Expanding fundraising efforts for RPL from private sources.
- Developing innovative programs and spaces for learning, culture, and creativity.
- Exploring partnerships with Rochester's community organizations and institutions.
- Building philanthropic support for RPL's facilities and services.

RPL's youth services and programming are highly valued.

As a result of these conversations, several critical issues to RPL's long-term success were identified, including:

- To remain relevant as the city grows and demographics shift, RPL needs to enhance outreach efforts to expand awareness of the library's programs, services, and collection.
- Improving the institutional and funding relationship between the City of Rochester and RPL and the RPL Board. The RPL Board needs to remedy disconnects between the city and library and improve communications and understanding of RPL's role as an active partner in the city.

Community Visioning



One of three community visioning boards used for input. Children's exhibits, demonstration kitchens, educational gardens, and outdoor community space were ranked highest in among respondents as benefits to the community at large.

The community visioning was conducted using "dot-voting" on imagery of innovative libraries from across the United States. These conversations were conducted at multiple locations around the city (e.g., Latinofest, downtown farmer's market, the downtown library, and bookmobile stops). Additional input was gathered through a series of one-on-one phone interviews with key community stakeholders, summarized on page 17.

Community visioning during 2024 Candidate Forum event.

Community Participation

The zip codes of respondents were tracked, and representation for each zip code correlated closely to the overall population distribution within the city and county. Approximately 17% of all respondents do not currently use the library.

Emerging Themes

The themes that emerged from the community visioning engagement were consistent across each event attended.

Parking and the desire for a branch location were the most frequent answers to the question "What would improve your experience at the library?"

When asked "What does your community need?" residents most frequently noted affordable housing, access to green space, space to connect and engage with community, and improvements to public transportation.

Respondents referenced the desire for educational gardens, outdoor community space, children's exhibits, and demonstration kitchens.

Community visioning at Rochester Farmers Market.

What would improve your experience at the library?

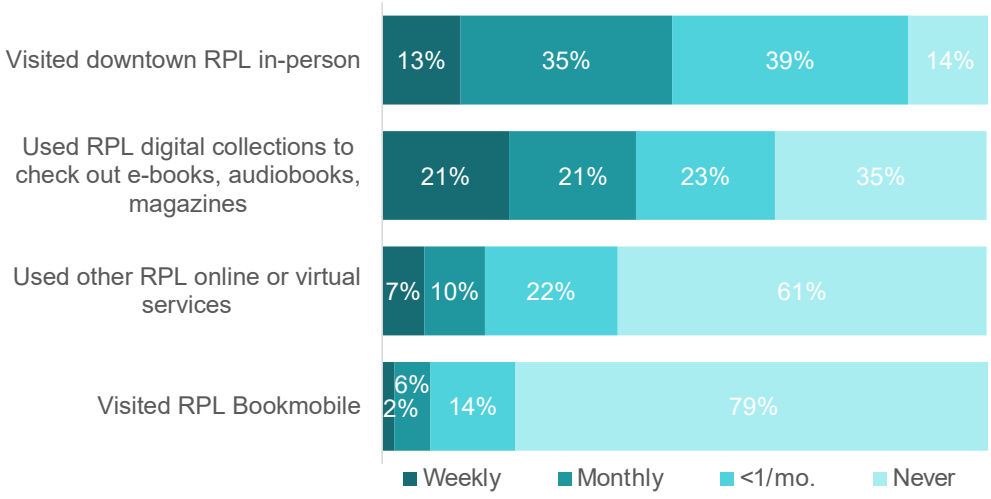
Community Quantitative Survey

A quantitative community survey was conducted online from May 16-June 8, 2025. Survey objectives were developed to build upon insights gained during earlier rounds of qualitative engagement. The survey link was promoted and distributed in myriad ways to encourage participation from a cross-section of Olmsted County residents and include both library users and non-users. **A total of 4,517 people completed the survey,** which is sufficiently robust to provide valuable insights from the population overall as well as important sub-groups.

Most respondents strongly agree that there is value in having library resources available to the community regardless of how much they personally use them (88%), and that RPL is a worthwhile use of their tax dollars (72%). However, **there are clear barriers to visiting RPL downtown, primarily related to parking proximity and cost.** Having more free parking available in the ramp would make it easier to access the downtown library.

There is also considerable interest in being able to access library services outside of downtown via smaller satellite libraries and/or pick-up spots for materials at partner locations. Residents see opportunities for improvement in the utilization of space in the downtown library. Their first choice of rooftop green space may not be feasible, but other appealing possibilities include redesigned space for young children, and more options for both small, private spaces and larger program/event spaces. When it comes to programs and services, awareness of some RPL offerings is quite high (e.g., at least two-thirds are aware of the Friends Bookstore, the Seed Library, and access to technology), while fewer than one-in-five are aware of others like Convert-O-Lab, Library @ Home, sound booth, sensory friendly opportunities, and the ability to access past programs. For most of the programs/services asked about directly, 5% of respondents or less had participated in the past year. **More than half indicated that they would be more likely to participate in RPL programs if they were available outside of the downtown area.**

Frequency of visiting/using RPL services



Type of User (in past 12 months)

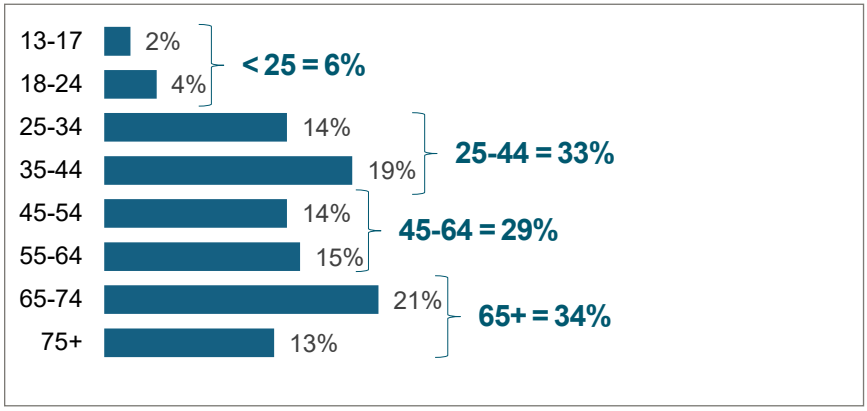
In-person only	18%
Digital/online only	7%
Bookmobile only	1%
Multiple ways	69%
Non-user	6%

Visited/used RPL for any reason (in past 12 months)

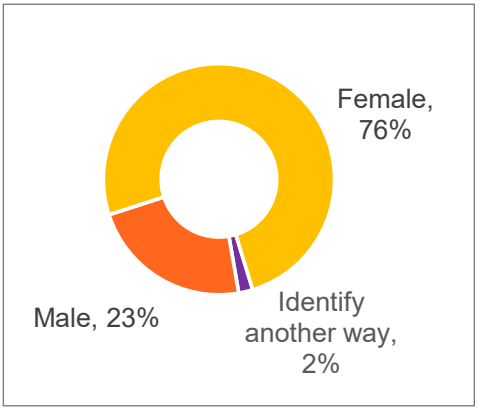
Weekly	32%
Monthly	39%
< 1/month	24%
Never	6%

Survey Input: "it would be helpful to have more flexible, multi-use spaces in the library. For example, rooms that can be used for quiet study, group work, or community programs depending on the time of day. Adding more comfortable seating areas, natural light, and kid-friendly zones would also make the space more inviting. Lastly, having a designated teen area could encourage older youth to use the library in a way that feels welcoming and age appropriate."

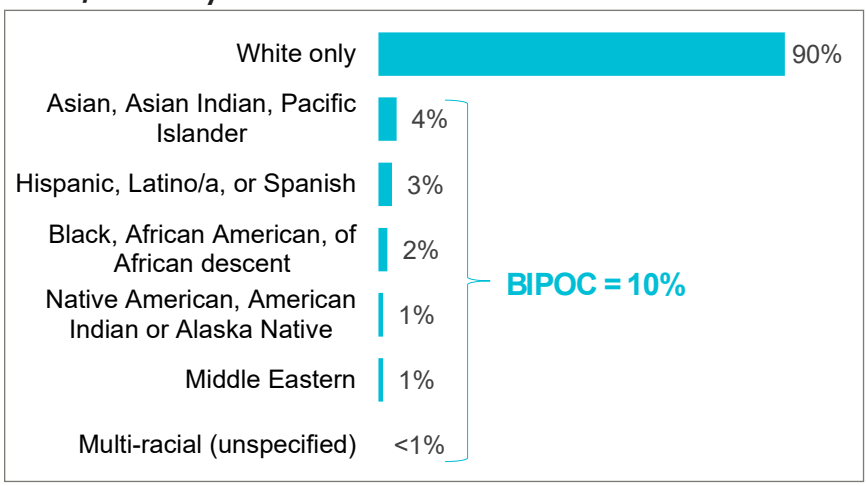
Age Range



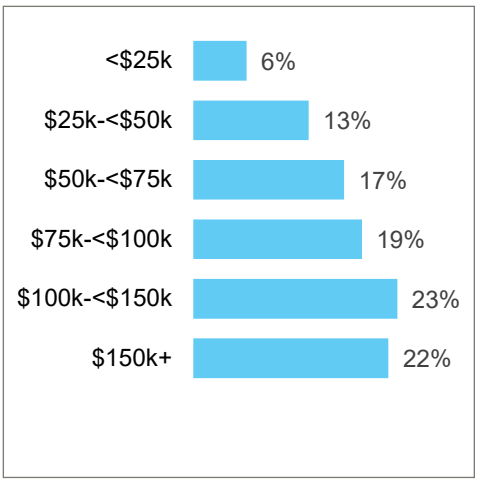
Gender Identity



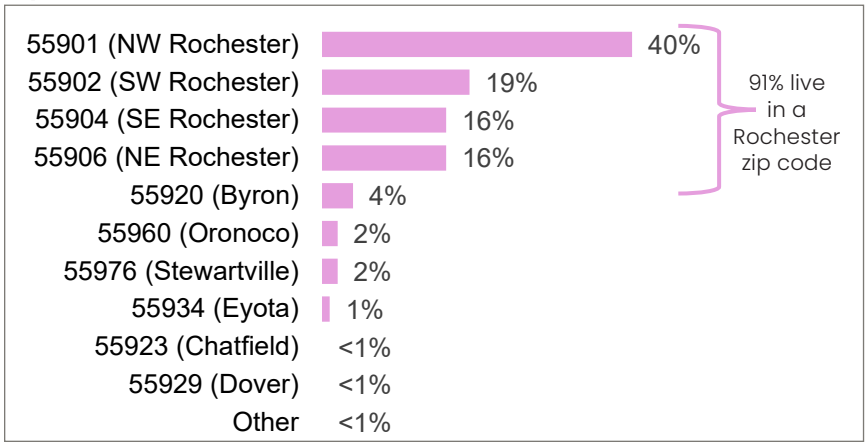
Race / Ethnicity



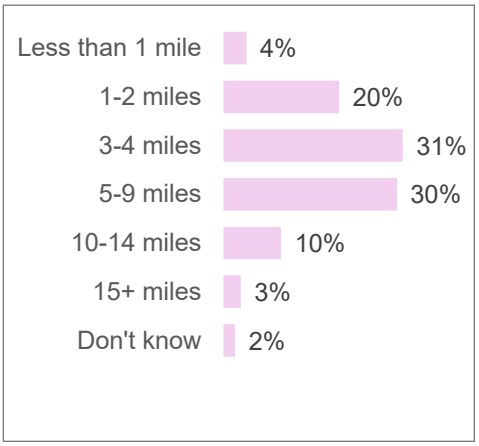
Household Income



Zip Code



Distance from home to RPL

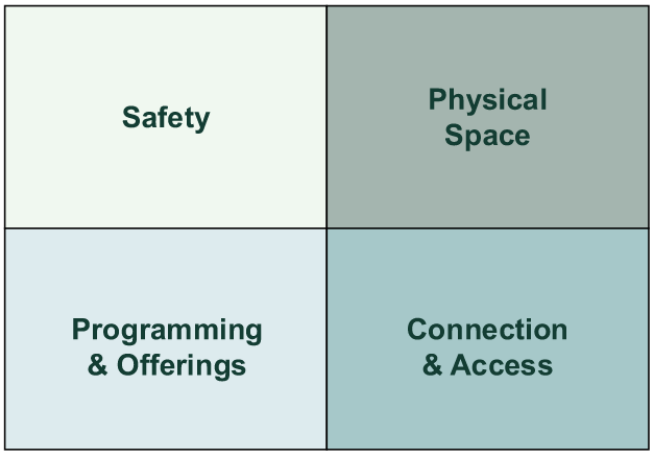


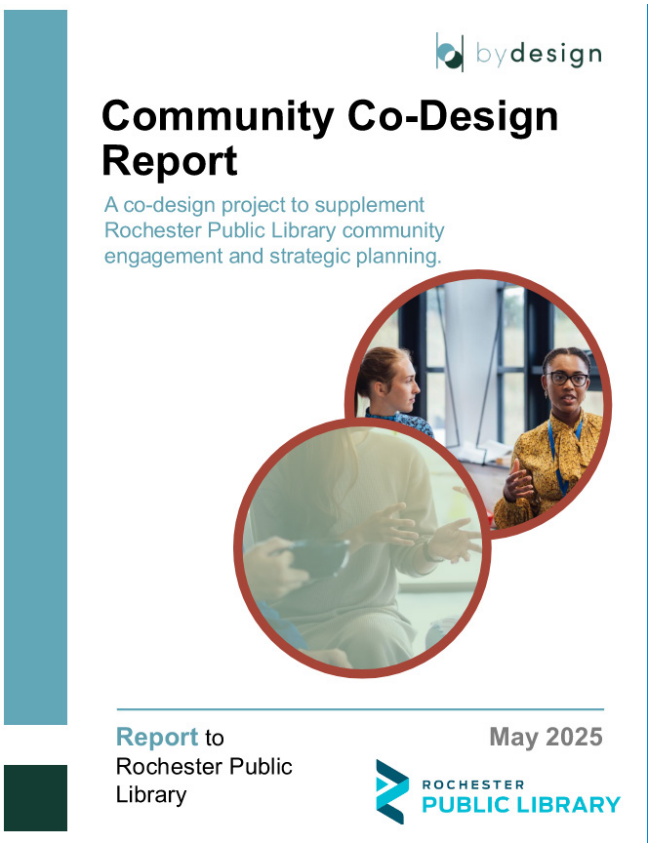
Community Co-Design

The co-design effort engaged with a variety of communities across the Rochester region, specifically those who had not had a meaningful way to inform library policy and practices in the past. The co-designers met on 4 occasions and held interviews with friends, family, and neighbors to inform the master plan recommendations.

The following themes were identified and prioritize by the co-designers:

- **Safety:** Develop strategies, spaces, and programming that ensure safe and welcoming experiences for everyone, especially women (of all ages), LGBTQIA+ individuals, and under-represented communities
- **Physical Space:** Develop spaces that are broadly welcoming and respond to the community's sense of place, safety, and well-being
- **Programming + Offerings:** Develop strategies, spaces, and programming that align with a diversity of community values, beliefs, rituals, and hopes without being overwhelming or confusing to navigate
- **Connection + Access:** Develop culturally nourishing strategies, spaces, and programming that proactively reach communities that have not traditionally visited the library or used its services





by design led a Community Co-Design project to expand opportunities for input that informs plan recommendations.

Recommendations

Recommendations

With an overarching aim to develop and organize the RPL staff and its leadership to position the library as a transformative institution in partnership with city and county governments and other local institutions, the plan identifies four key areas of focus:

Identity: Raise the library's profile in the community, and, critically, with city and county leadership.

Leadership: Foster a culture of innovation and transformation and develop strong leaders for the challenges ahead. Align city and county goals and strengthen the partnerships with RPL Library Foundation and Friends of the Library to achieve the library's service goals.

Operations: Review and revise the library's organizational structure, collections management, technology, and programming to respond to future needs.

Facilities: Expand library services throughout the city to improve access for all and address access issues to—and within—the downtown library.

Each recommendation includes a summary of the anticipated impact (the "why"), ideas for implementation, examples from other libraries for inspiration, and (where applicable), rough-order-of-magnitude resources required to achieve the recommendation.

Recommendations | Identity

Raise the library's profile in the community

Why this recommendation?

Based on outreach conducted in person, through interviews, and via surveys, the recommendation is to build on the work the library is already doing by expanding its visibility and partnerships so that the full scope of its impact is more broadly understood and felt. Growth and population movement away from downtown have made everyday awareness of the library less consistent, and outreach has at times been fragmented and limited to traditional channels. Addressing that means taking the library into the places where people live, learn, work, and gather and doing so in close collaboration with local organizations, businesses, schools, and other community partners. By aligning with others, the library can become a central hub of support, strengthening existing services and programs, attracting new customers, sharing resources, and clarifying its identity and return on investment to stakeholders and funders. Examples of effective approaches elsewhere include embedding services in schools and health clinics, staging pop-up activations in growing neighborhoods, co-hosting community festivals, and partnering on early literacy events. These steps will enhance visibility, broaden access, deepen community connection, and build momentum for sustained support.

Ideas for implementation

- Host more tables at neighborhood and city events with library card sign-ups and promo materials.
- Continue to partner with city and county divisions, schools, nonprofits, and early childhood programs to offer sign-ups, story times, programming, book clubs, start-up book bags, and joint literacy events.
- Cohost community festivals, take-and-make craft events, and digital engagement campaigns with local organizations to raise visibility.
- Use targeted digital outreach and local ambassadors to reach audiences in nontraditional ways, combining in-person touchpoints with online reminders and content.
- Provide monthly updates to community councils with updates on events, partnerships and offer support through outreach.

Collaborating on programming strengthens partnerships.

Precedents

New York Public Library's Teen Reading Ambassadors program develops leadership and job readiness skills for teens. Participants write and edit a special magazine for kids, while serving as role models and ambassadors for reading and learning. https://www.nypl.org/remote-learning-resources/teen-reading-ambassadors

Missoula Public Library's partnership with multiple organizations has created deep multigenerational impacts, such as through their "road show," which takes programming to surrounding rural areas with each community partner contributing an aspect of the program (e.g., STEAM activity material, technologies, and literary resources): https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10598650.2025.2524264

Missoula Public Library shares its building with multiple community partners, including the local university's STEM lab.

Raise the library's profile with city and county leadership

Why this recommendation?

Being known and understood by local elected officials is essential because it builds trust, opens channels for collaboration, and ensures that the library's value is visible in civic conversations. Partnering with local officials in their neighborhoods strengthens awareness, deepens connections with communities, and creates a shared roadmap for success that aligns vision, and community success metrics, with library goals. When elected leaders see the library as a trusted partner, they are more likely to advocate for resources, support joint initiatives, and help amplify outreach. The impact of this work is twofold: the organization gains credibility, sustained support, and clearer pathways for growth while the community benefits from more responsive services, stronger civic engagement, and a sense that local institutions are working together to meet shared needs.

Ideas for implementation

- School-district partnerships that issue student library cards and embed literacy programs in classrooms.
- Community reading campaigns with mayoral involvement such as citywide book club efforts and summer reading promotions.
- Quarterly updates to city officials, success emails to leadership and staff.
- Literacy events in collaboration with elected officials, police, or first responders to connect safe spaces and activities with safety and reading.
- Take a group of city and county leaders on a library tour to experience leading and future-focused library services together.
- Share success stories about how the library promotes and furthers city and county goals and the community's growth.

Precedents

San Jose Public Library – Read to Succeed Police Partnership: https://www.sjpl.org/blogs/post/read-to-succeed-storytime-with-the-sjpd/

Mayor Book Clubs/Literacy Outreach Events:

https://www.fortworthtexas.gov/departments/library/summer

https://arthurbrooks.com/events/mayorbookclub

https://www.saltlakecounty.gov/mayor/bookclub/

https://www.actionnewsjax.com/news/local/jacksonville-4-year-olds-receive-one-free-book-each-month-through-mayors-book-club/O3M5GMNBEBHTZBC4YTXDEWEVBA/

https://www.cityofmesquite.com/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2290

https://www.missoulapubliclibrary.org/grow/the-culture-house-model/

Meeting space at Missoula Public Library & Culture House.

Suggested buildings for educational tour

Missoula Public Library & Culture House, Missoula, MT
Innovative and impactful partnership model; illustrates impact of investing in a community-centric building on downtown vitality.

Austin Public Library, Austin TX
Example of a large main library with community gathering space that takes advantage of its place (rooftop gathering)

L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library, Eau Claire, WI
Renovation addition that supports multi-literacy learning and play.

Bentonville Public Library, Bentonville, AR
Renovation addition that supports multi-literacy learning and play.

Fayetteville Public Library, Fayetteville, AR
Renovation addition that supports multi-literacy learning and play, and workforce development through innovative labs and teaching kitchen.

Hennepin County Library Southdale Library & Edina Art Center, Edina, MN.
Example of a library designed for partnerships and community gathering (opening 2027)

Chicago Public Library, Chicago, IL
Example of library and housing colocation.

Missoula Public Library & Culture House

L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library

Hennepin County Library Southdale Library & Edina Art Center

Recommendations | Leadership

Foster a culture of innovation and transformation and develop strong leaders for the challenges ahead

Why this recommendation?

An innovative library is relevant to its community. It maintains the pulse of what a community needs to thrive now, and in the future, and is nimble so it can respond to changing needs and shifts in financial and political landscapes.

Innovative libraries are places where tradition is respected, and transformation is welcomed. Where taking risks and learning from the experience are seen as essential. An innovative library has support from its Board and its governmental authority and inspires the actions of sister organizations like the Friends of the Library and Library Foundation. It has strong leadership that encourages creative problem-solving and a staff that understands that risk-taking is valued and supported. To continue the growth and development of RPL into a well-supported, well-known, and well-loved institution, leadership of RPL must be forward-thinking and nimble, and foster a culture that reflects that ethos.

Ideas for implementation

Library director, leadership staff, and library board set the tone for staff.

- Make space for staff to develop and try out new ideas, experiment, and be creative to send a message that innovation is not only welcome but necessary to the library's future.
- Maintain openness to new ideas: A great deal can be learned from what went wrong as well as what went right.
- Provide communications training to develop tailored messaging and persuasive communication techniques for engaging with community members and leaders
- Developing strong leaders takes time and commitment.
- Provide ongoing staff development opportunities for staff at all levels to learn about innovative approaches and best practices in next-generation public library services.
- Create programs to mentor staff who have been identified as having leadership abilities.
- Provide in-house staff development opportunities on management skills, strategic planning, community engagement, navigating public policy processes.
- Provide support for learning through external programs and conferences.

Staff encouragement is key to creating a culture of innovation.

- Consider development of pilot programs, "pitch days" in which library staff pitch new ideas that may be selected for trial, innovation task forces, and cross-functional staff teams for problem solving.
- Promote a structure of ongoing engagement aimed at identifying new/unique ways to deliver value to the community (e.g., "meet to learn" engagements with key community members and leaders).

Making room for staff experimentation promotes innovation.

Create alignment with city and county goals

Why this recommendation?

Across the country, government organizations are breaking down silos with cross-agency partnerships that deliver services and learning in different settings, expanding access and reaching new audiences. By hosting shared programs, co-promoting initiatives, and pooling resources, the library is seen as a safe space and can be key in helping other agencies and elected officials inform the public, increase use of complementary services, build community support for planning, and reduce staffing pressure through collaboration, creating a more efficient and connected civic ecosystem. This isn't mission creep, but a new way of reaching constituents where they are and bringing resources to them. Our communities are changing, and government needs to change with them by innovating and evolving service delivery methods.

Ideas for implementation

Position library staff as integral partners within the city and county systems by actively engaging in city and county initiatives.

- Work with elected officials and other divisions through workshops, coordinated special-event sign-ups, and convening groups in need of resources will expand and deepen its community impact.
- Identify community needs over the next 1-2 years at the city leadership level and focus on areas where the library can enhance services for the community.

Create collaborative partnerships with other city and county departments to broaden the library's customer base.

- Offer space and resources within the library to pilot partnerships. For example, help people sign up for Medicaid at the library in partnership with the health department or conduct resume writing workshops in partnership with Mayo Clinic.

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Precedents

Many libraries partner with city economic development offices, career centers, and small business support programs to offer job training, resume help, entrepreneurship support, and technology access. RPL can partner with divisions to bring services to the community in more than one place.

Examples:

https://www.ala.org/news/2020/07/cambria-county-library-workforce-development-program-captures-interest-national

https://georgialibraries.org/public-libraries-benefits-kiosks/#:~:text=The%20kiosks%20provide%20convenient%20access,Families%20(TANF)%3B%20Childcare%20and

https://www.rutgers.edu/news/social-work-interns-find-world-need-public-libraries

Strengthen the Library Foundation and Friends

Why this recommendation?

The Friends of RPL and the RPL Foundation are doing important work supporting the library through book sales, membership, advocacy, and philanthropic investment. Their collective impact would grow significantly through tighter alignment with the library's strategic goals and with each other. A coordinated approach amplifies fundraising, clarifies public messaging, reduces duplication, and more directly supports the library director's priorities. Each organization should ground their work in this question: is all the work being done moving the library forward?

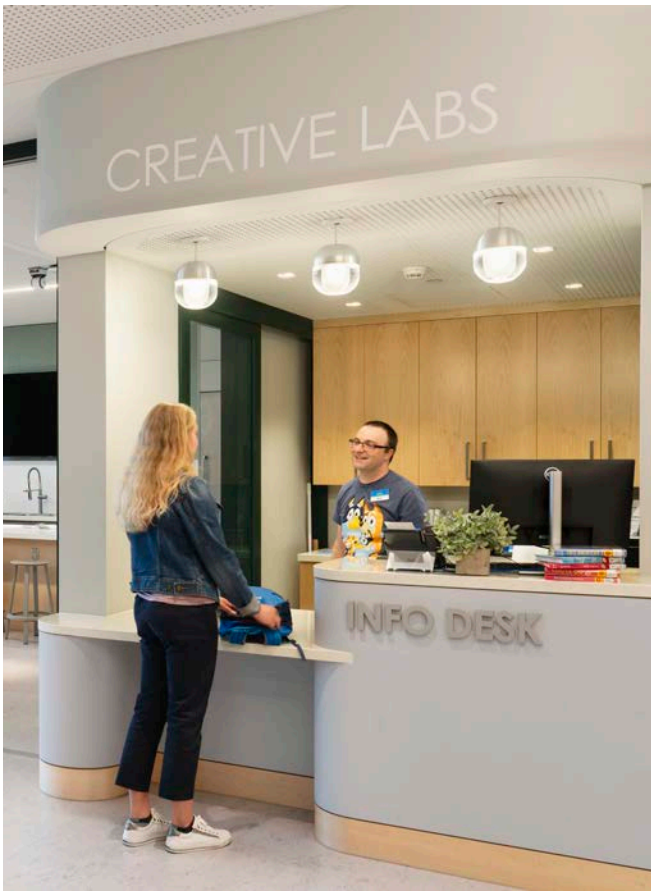
The most successful friends and library foundations have active relationships in which the three organizations (library, friends, and foundation) are combining efforts for maximum benefit with goals and outcomes clearly articulated, evaluated, and reported on an ongoing basis. Shared goals, joint outreach, donor data sharing, and consistent information exchange are essential so that all three entities speak with one voice about needs, opportunities, and outcomes.

Aligning these three entities will create a more cohesive system of support, elevate the library's public identity, and unlock new philanthropic and community investment. Ongoing fundraising training and information sharing on trends and partnerships will be key to the growth of these organizations. In conversations with the public, stakeholders, and organization leaders, we have identified a gap in general awareness of the foundation, despite overall support for the library and what appears to be interest in philanthropic support.

Ideas for implementation

Align RPL Friends', RPL Foundation's, and RPL's mission and purpose.

- Host a yearly joint summit with leadership from RPL, the RPL Friends, and the RPL Foundation to agree on shared annual objectives.
- Draft and adopt a coordinated strategic fundraising plan with clear goals, measures of success and reporting.

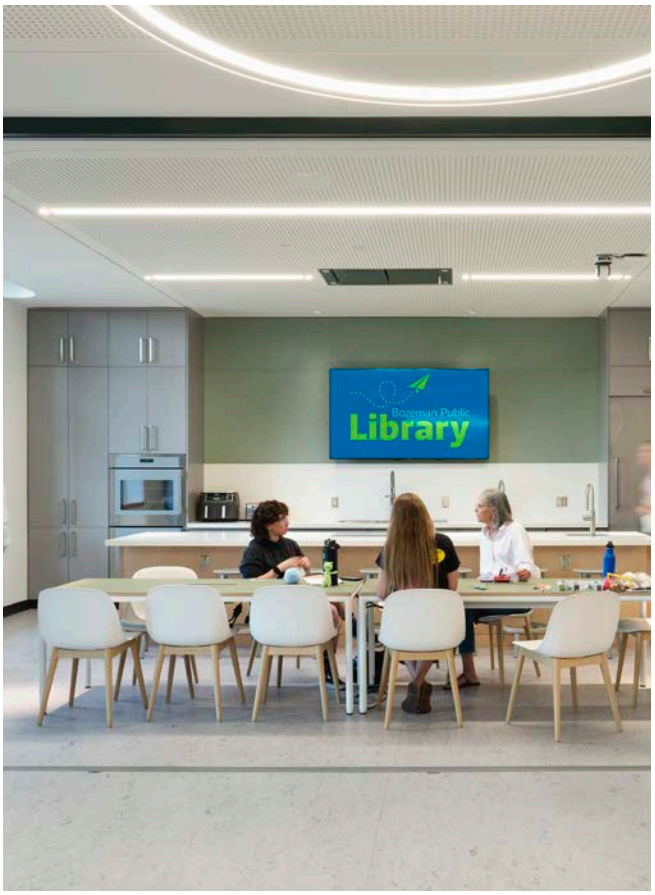


Bozeman Public Library Foundation and Bozeman Public Library work in lockstep towards library goals.

- Include donor outreach meetings, events and coordination with library leadership.
- Identify a clear case for support in partnership with the library leadership that includes an articulate list of needs with fundraising efforts and a clear path to achieving them.
- Outline grants and sponsorship ask and share work across organizations to ensure alignment of priorities, objectives and marketing needs.
- Craft a plan for donor acquisition, retention rates, engagement benchmarks, awareness targets.
- Activate "who we know" and "who we need to know" list and work to make connections.
- Segment donors/prospects (e.g., major, mid-level, new, lapsed) and map tailored cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship steps for each segment. Share with organizations based on identified interests and track engagement efforts. (i.e. volunteer, books, financial support).
- ROI on events, grants and outreach efforts streamlined to maximize revenue and time.
- Reporting and tracking system for dollars needed, broken out by source (e.g., major gifts, grants, events).
- Ongoing coordination and alignment.

Strengthen collaboration with the affiliated organizations through renewed engagement.

- Create a shared donor database with information tracking that can be accessed by leadership to ensure tracking, follow-up and outreach.
- Create and monitor fundraising and outreach calendars for all three organizations.
- Report goals and outcomes to the Library director and board on a quarterly basis.
- Create shared advocacy roles and messaging in partnership with library and board leadership.



Bozeman Public Library Foundation contributed key funding for recent BPL building improvements.

Redefine the foundation's mission in partnership with the library and establish shared annual goals.

- A retreat with leadership of both. organizations to create a clear partnership.
- Outlining goals and tactics for achieving success (3 years).
- Quarterly leadership check in meetings to measure success and ensure ongoing partnership.

Enhance fundraising effectiveness through targeted training programs for library and foundation board staff.

- Create shared advocacy tools and trainings to align with library leadership.
- Attend trainings and information sessions on how to expand and build foundations and friends, identify trends and grow efforts.
- Ensure board onboarding includes library-101 and fundraising-101 training.

Evolve processes and technology to support a next-generation library and look to operational efficiencies across organizations.

RPL's Summer Playlist, which promotes summer reading, is an example of impactful programming supported by the Friends.

Precedents

Recently a group has formed to help libraries, foundations and friends group learn and grow: Seattle Public Library Foundation helped launch https://community.librarysupportnetwork.org/. This organization is geared toward best practices and training for successful library partnerships and fundraising.

Library leaders and foundations (vary in size, staff and budget)

https://libraryfoundationsd.org/

https://supportspl.org/

https://duluthlibraryfoundation.org/

https://www.aacpl.net/

Recommendations | Operations

Review and revise library organizational structure; evaluate job classifications and update as necessary

Why this recommendation?

The Rochester Public Library is in the process of reinventing itself and its position as a critical educational and cultural asset in the community. Central to that reinvention is the library staff and its organizational structure. Does RPL have the right organizational structure and positions to move forward and accomplish what it hopes to achieve in the future? And how do the organizational structure and staffing fit its mission and evolving service delivery plans?

Ideas for implementation

A look at the organizational structure should address several key questions:

- Ensure RPL's goals and strategies for the future are reflected in its organizational structure and are able to be modified, adapted, and changed as needed.
- Ensure reporting relationships are not overly hierarchical or siloed.
- Critically review the current functional areas to determine if they make sense, or should they be modified/updated/changed (e.g. public services and administration).

Job descriptions should also be reviewed and evaluated in terms of essential duties, competencies required, credentials (e.g. degrees, experience, and skills), reporting lines and job titles.

This review can be done by the library and/or in coordination with the City of Rochester's Human Resources department as required/necessary.

New services and new technology often mean a new job description and/or title that reflects the library's strategies for public service in the future.

Precedents

Many libraries have, in recent years, created job titles such as "digital services coordinator" and, "community engagement specialist", to better achieve their strategic goals.

A review of RPL's org structure ensures staff roles are aligned to current and future public services.

Retool collections management strategy to align with current and emerging community needs

Why this recommendation?

Begin by asking an important question: "Are we a book repository or a library?" This question goes to the heart of what the role of the public library is now and will become in the future. It, addresses question of how the library morphs from a transactional institution to a transformational one.

The move to a transformational library requires an extensive, proactive, well-selected, and well-managed collection, one that meets the needs and interests of the residents of Rochester and the surrounding areas and provides both high interest materials and materials that support the RPL's mission and goals.

Ideas for implementation

A set of collection management principles has been developed for consideration as a starting point for discussion, consideration, and action. The collection of the RPL should:

- Enhance and support the mission, vision and values of the RPL.
- Support the goals of RPL (as articulated in a future library strategic plan).
- Serve as a single collection that integrates physical and electronic resources for the downtown library, bookmobile, and potential satellite libraries.

Collections reflecting diverse community interests and needs result in higher use.

Principles

The collection should focus on general materials over scholarly and professional materials. Access to more specialized materials will be provided through interlibrary loans, cooperative agreements and other means of referral.

The collection should reflect the interests and needs of the diverse communities in Rochester by providing resources and information that are relevant, current, represent a variety of points of view and meet public demand.

The collection should include a variety of formats (e.g., print, media, and digital) as currently available and evaluate the inclusion of new and emerging formats in the future.

The collection should be managed with ongoing and regular assessments of its usage and usefulness and by identifying areas that need additional titles and/or new editions.

The collection should include materials that are reflective of the languages spoken in the community. Inclusion in and withdrawal from the world language collections shall be evaluated based on the evolving demographics of Rochester and the County.

The downtown library's Local History Collection is a significant resource and should be enhanced, preserved and digitized where possible.

The collections in satellite libraries will be developed to serve the needs of the communities in which they are situated and will reflect the interests of the users of each facility.

Practices for Evaluating the Collection

The time to begin evaluating the collection with a critical eye to making it more focused, up-to-date, responsive to the public's needs and, most importantly, well-used, is now. The staff has done an important job in collecting and assembling data that will be most useful in determining the status of items in the downtown library. In addition, information from the ILS will provide critical data for assessing the use of individual items and the areas that need updating and adding to the collection. The RPL staff will be key to evaluating the collection. The staff's knowledge and expertise are invaluable to this process.

Among the criteria that should be used in evaluating the withdrawal of material is that an item is:

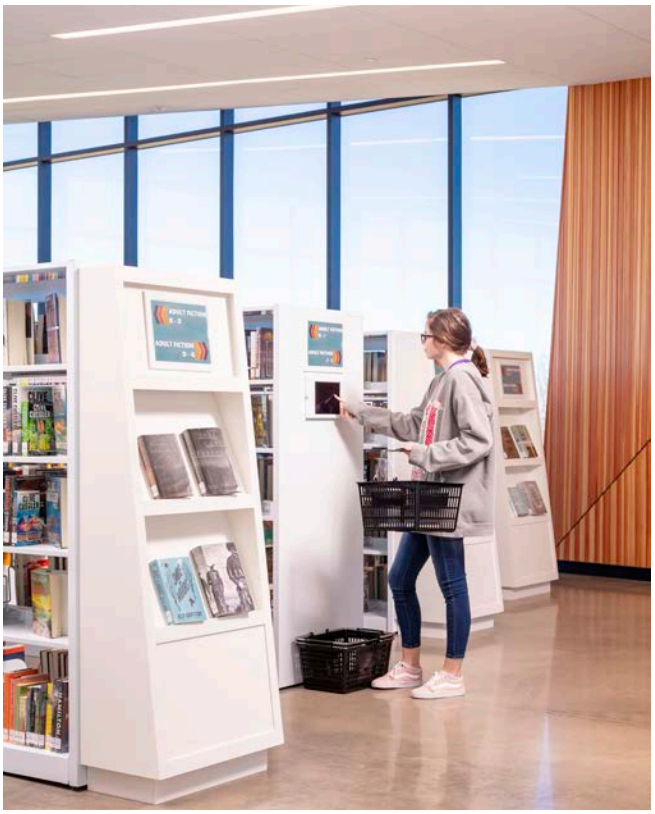
- No longer used
- No longer useful
- Obsolete or outdated
- Replaced by more current information or new editions
- Damaged
- One or more of multiple copies that are no longer necessary to retain
- Part of an incomplete set
- No longer relevant to the overall collection

At this point, last copies should not be withdrawn unless that item is so damaged it cannot be used. Last copies should be evaluated to see if other libraries, either in the Rochester area or in Minnesota, have the item and if it could be borrowed if a RPL user needs it. Items that are significant historically and/or locally should be retained.

Precedents

A number of urban public libraries (e.g., Cincinnati Hamilton County Public Library, Dayton Metropolitan Library, the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh) have undertaken a collection evaluation process to right-size their collections.

Additionally, libraries are now making sure that they are allocating their collection materials budget in keeping with collection usage. As the use of electronic resources such as eBooks and media grows annually, the proportions of the budget allocated to each type of materials also much be adapted.



Many public libraries undertake a collection evaluation process to right-size their collections and inform selections.

Review and improve technology

Why this recommendation?

Public libraries utilize technology both for library operations and for public service and access. The accelerating rate of change makes it critical that the RPL reviews and improves its technology infrastructure on a regular basis. This process can be done using library staff who are knowledgeable about the library's technology and the marketplace or engage a library technology consultant to conduct an assessment and prepare a technology plan for the future.

A technology plan is often a component of strategic planning.

Ideas for implementation

The technology plan should include future trends, community needs and budgetary and staff impact. The plan should address the issues of whether library technologies are consistent with the goals and objectives of the institution and whether they support equitable access to RPL.

This plan should:

- Review and evaluate current technology employed by the library (hardware and software) as well as digital services for functionality, and usage.
- Gather feedback from RPL staff about the technologies used by the library and any user issues they have consistently dealt with.
- Develop a short customer survey (or a suggestion box) about what digital and technology services they use and what they would like to see RPL provide in the future in its support of learning, work, creativity and community.
- Align with RPL's strategic plan.
- Consider impact on staff and staff training needs as well as developing a plan for training for public on new technologies.
- Depending on the expertise of library staff and/or the engagement of a library technology consultant, reviewing and improving technology is a regular activity for almost every public library. It often is a component of annual budget review of needs and an important component of strategic planning and review.

Fayetteville Public Library supports workforce development with its simulation lab, in which community members can log practice hours on heavy equipment simulators.

Review and improve programming for all ages

Why this recommendation?

Public programming at RPL is popular and could be even more so with improvements. Survey respondents report being aware of 7+ programs but only report participating in an average of 1.5. Programming is a valuable tool for public libraries to serve the variety of constituencies in its community. Programs reflect the library's mission and goals. They serve as a means of community outreach and contact; a way to provide education, entertainment and cultural awareness; and opportunities for connection and civic discourse. Library programming must be adaptable and nimble. Programs can be presented in person, online, hybrid (both) formats and are an excellent means for community participation and involvement. Exciting and broad ranging programs are an opportunity for RPL to position itself as a vital and valuable community asset.

Ideas for implementation

Community needs and interests for children, teens, adults, and elders in the community are an important starting place in planning library programs.

- Lead participatory events in community spaces (e.g., schools, churches, housing sites) where library staff ask questions and test ideas.

Survey input: "When taking a survey there was one page of questions that was informative of what you offer, that I wasn't aware of. I was very impressed of the things that are offered that I had no idea that Rochester Public Library offers to the community."

- Consider known community needs when designing programs:
  - language learning classes
  - cultural storytelling and celebrations
  - more forums on a broader range of community issues
  - digital literacy instruction
  - AI boot camps
  - author readings

Library programming can be an excellent template for building and nurturing partnerships with other community and civic organizations in Rochester, broadening its outreach and visibility in the community.

- Expand programs presented in the library by partner organizations.
- Cosponsor additional programs in other venues with partners.

Consider reengaging in virtual programming.

- An important lesson from the pandemic: when libraries were closed physically, they "opened" the library virtually through programs like story hours, puppet shows, author talks and many other types of virtual programming which were well attended and very much appreciated.
- Many community members need (or desire) flexibility in when to engage with programming.

Precedents

https://www.urbanlibraries.org/innovations/new-york-public-librarys-teen-civics-ambassadors

https://www.urbanlibraries.org/innovations/new-start-entrepreneurship-incubator

https://programminglibrarian.org/articles/multiculturalism-happens-targeting-multicultural-literacy-libraries

Robust STEM, STEAM, and other hands-on learning activities are a “must have” in the libraries of today and tomorrow.

Recommendations | Facilities

Pilot 2 hours of free parking for library users

Why this recommendation?

Community feedback from surveys, listening sessions, and interviews consistently cites access to the library from the Civic Center parking ramp as a barrier, as well as the costs associated with parking downtown. This finding echoes other city agency reports (e.g., 2024 Parking System Evaluation and Rate Study). Although the City offers free ramp parking if in and out in under an hour, library users find it to be challenging to park, get into the library, attend a program or peruse materials, and exit the ramp in under an hour. Because the parking ramp is one of the only ways patrons can stay for an extended visit, we recommend launching a parking pilot in coordination with city leadership and community partners to test whether lowering that barrier increases library use. Three quarters of survey respondents say that 2-hours of validated parking in the ramp would make it easier to use the library. Ideally the city would fund or partially fund the study since it already invests hundreds of thousands annually in the library; removing access barriers can amplify that investment by driving higher engagement and demonstrating return. Framing the pilot as a partnership, investing in targeted outreach, and tracking results will help give elected leaders evidence of impact.

Ideas for implementation

Partner with the city's transportation and economic development teams to secure partial funding and formalize the pilot scope.

- Identify matching philanthropic/corporate support to offset impact to city revenue.

Design and launch the pilot (for example, extended free parking for library patrons during a 6-month window, or a "first X hours free" campaign), with clear time limits.

- Collect baseline data on current library visits, parking usage patterns, program attendance, and user-reported access challenges.
- Implement a marketing campaign using city and library channels, garage signage, email/newsletter outreach, social media, local media, and community intermediary partners to ensure patrons know about the temporary change.
- Track metrics including changes in visitation, average dwell time, program participation, parking occupancy, validations and gather quick exit surveys on perceived access.

Analyze results, compare them to baseline, and produce a brief report for elected officials and stakeholders with recommendations on continuation, scaling, or adjustment.

Precedents

Pilot programs and studies have been conducted across the country to demonstrate success with parking changes. For example, while The Salt Lake City Public Library didn't conduct a pilot program, it did change parking based on community concerns and complaints, and staff are grateful for the opportunity it has presented for more access and fewer parking complaints.

https://raleighnc.gov/transportation/news/raleigh-launches-2-hour-free-parking-downtown-decks

https://townlift.com/2021/09/new-free-two-hour-parking-at-salt-lake-citys-main-library/

https://www.sfmta.com/getting-around/drive-park/demand-responsive-pricing/sfpark-evaluation

Pilot satellite locations

Why this recommendation?

The community's desire for branch libraries is clear in the engagement findings. The perceived lack of parking that allows easy access to the library, cost of parking and short duration of free parking available, and for some, discomfort driving downtown were cited frequently as barriers to utilizing the library. As the city has grown, the population has densified north and south of the downtown—with nearly two-thirds of residents living in the northwest and southeast (i.e., zip codes 55901 and 55904). Getting to the library from the northwest and southeast areas of the city creates difficulties for some community members:

- Link, the planned Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line, is anticipated to come online in summer 2027. This route runs east-west along 2nd street and will be a wonderful addition to the downtown, easing downtown parking concerns by offering a parking hub and quick access to downtown locations—including the library—on the BRT. However, the City of Rochester footprint extends northwest and southeast, and transit coverage is more limited on the edges of the city.
- For many addresses along the northwest edge or southeast edge of Rochester, the Walk Score calculator rating for walking, biking, or using public transit is quite low (https://www.walkscore.com). Walk times are frequently above 60 minutes and commuting is between 33 to 36 minutes. Utilizing transit may also be a barrier, with trips taking 55 minutes.
- For those with access to vehicles, drive times range from 10-15 minutes from both locations. This commute time to the library does not factor in time spent finding parking and then getting to the library entry.
- Even for those with access to vehicles, finding parking that is near the front door continues to be a barrier for those with mobility challenges.

In the most recent survey, 51% of respondents expressed an interest in satellite libraries. Perhaps not surprisingly there was a slight increase (57%) for individuals living further away (5 or more miles) from the library.

> ***Survey input: "please, please, please make it easier for disabled people to get to, and park at, the library. The disabled parking is always full and I can't use the ramp very well due to mobility limitations (too far to walk). I'd use the library far more often if it were more disability friendly."***

Sno-Isle Libraries' Darrington Library shows how much can be offered in 3,500 square feet (renovation by MSR Design).

Why this recommendation? (cont)

42% of respondents indicate it is very likely that their frequency of library use would increase if there were a location near them. Offering library services at additional locations can be an effective method for expanding access to those who do not or cannot visit to the downtown location. Before investing in permanent branches, the plan's recommendation is to pilot two short-term locations ("satellites") to test whether additional places to access library services will increase library usage:

- Ideally two pilot projects, one in the northwest and one in the southeast, to occur simultaneously. If resources do not allow, recommend consecutive with as little time lag as possible between the two pilot projects.
- Allow each location to be open 12-18 months to provide ample usage data to gauge viability.
- Scale of spaces utilized for the pilots will necessarily hinge on what is available in the identified zones of the city (see map on page 48). Recommendation is for 2,000 – 5,000 usable square feet for each location, if possible. Minimum square footage recommended is 1,500 usable square feet.
- Timing of the pilots will hinge on available funding as well as the spaces that are available.

Of all the ideas for improvements to RPL, satellite locations is the only one that was selected in the top 3 more often by those who have never visited RPL in-person in the past year than by those who have (53%)

Sno-Isle Libraries Langley Library offers expansive services and programming space in just 5,000 square feet (renovation by MSR Design).

Ideas for implementation

Identify potential colocation partners

- Sharing space will be cost-effective and also an opportunity to forge new partnerships or strengthen current partnerships.
- City or school district may have (free!) space available for the pilot.

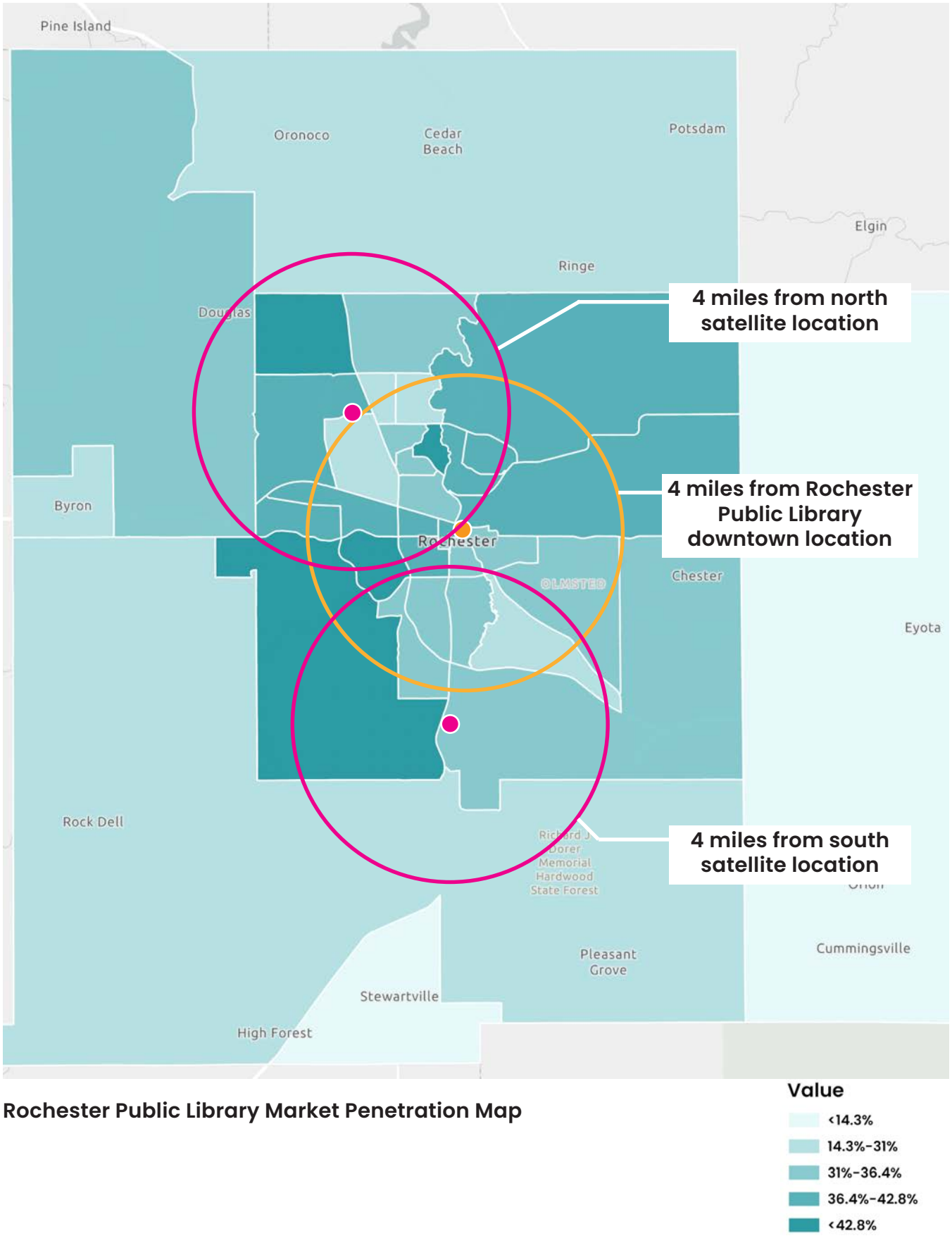
Identify potential locations

- Consider locations where people will already be (e.g., shopping centers, city services, schools).
- Work with city and community partners to identify potential properties in the recommended city regions.
- Ensure site is accessible multimodally (i.e., walkable, bikeable, drivable, accessible by public transit).
- Ensure site has sufficient free parking.
- Ideally minimal interior renovations/fit-out will be required (i.e., "move in ready"); cost estimates assume a scenario where full fit out is necessary.
- Outdoor green space adjacent to the library for programming and patron use is ideal but not required.
- Once a location is identified, consider providing bookmobile service to the area during the fit out of the space to build awareness for library services in that location prior to opening day.
- RPL will need to be flexible about locations based on availability and timing.

Identify what will be included for each location

- Collections and interactive fixtures
- Technology
- Furnishings and fixtures (e.g., lounge, study, focus room)
- Programming (could occur in a room, or with movable furniture, simply be floorspace)
- Staffing, staff spaces, service points
- Library materials transportation (staff and schedule)
- Signage (exterior identity, interior wayfinding)

The power of partners: Missoula Public Library & Culture House is home to several community partners, expanding and enhancing services and value to the community.



Rochester Public Library Market Penetration Map

Collect and analyze data on library use

- Gate count
- Circulation (broken out by children, teen, adult)
- Program attendance (broken out by children, teen, adult, family and by day of the week, evening, daytime, weekend

Market the pilots

- Get the word out through website, media, social media, opening event, bookmobile
- Brand the space so people know it's Rochester Public Library

Adjust as necessary

- A pilot is an opportunity to try out new ideas
- Pivot if something isn't working
- Have fun with the projects—these are important experiments and an opportunity to engage the public in meaningful, positive, fun ways

Analyze level of success of the pilots

- How did each pilot perform?
- What was learned that could apply downtown as well?
- Did one of the locations out-perform the other? Why?
- Did library use increase?
- Consider holding community "listening sessions" during pilot program to assess impact.

Note: if the pilots aren't successful the staff, collection, and furniture and fixtures purchased for them will be absorbed into the downtown location.

Precedents

Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX: https://dallaslibrary.librarymarket.com/branch/bookmarks-northpark-center

Sno-Isle Libraries, Mariner Community Library, Everett, WA: https://tinyurl.com/yc3bzr7e Bellingham Public Library, Bellingham, WA: https://bellinghampubliclibrary.org/news/library-branch-to-open-at-bellis-fair-mall

Dallas Public Library's Bookmarks, a children's branch in mall (designer unknown).

Costs

See Appendix H for more information regarding the associated costs and the underpinning assumptions for improvements that informed them.

Pilot holds pickup at partner locations

Why this recommendation?

Visiting downtown Rochester is often cited as a barrier, especially for those who have not visited the library in the past 12 months. The perceived lack of on-street parking, cost of parking, and discomfort driving downtown were cited more frequently among this cohort than among more frequent library users. Offering holds pickup at partner locations can be an effective method for expanding access to those who do not or cannot visit the downtown location.

Selecting the right partner will be critical to ensure that this service reaches those who need it most. Partnering offers benefits for both the library and their partner; each organization will have the opportunity to reach community members that have not used their services before.

This service will not take the place of the downtown library or a satellite location. Holds pickups are only a portion of the services that a full-service library can offer. Community members who visit the library to browse the collection, have an outing with children, participate in a program, and use technology will not be served by this service.

48% of survey respondents selected "Pickup spots for holds or materials at partner locations" in their top 3 for changes that would be the biggest improvements in offering services outside the downtown area. This is a close second to those who would like to see satellite branches outside of downtown.

Ideas for implementation

Library staff have already begun the process of understanding the operational needs of offering holds pickups at partner organizations. Next steps would include:

- Identify potential partner organizations that are well-connected to groups who have trouble accessing the library. (Community members with physical disabilities, limited access to transportation, etc.)
- Develop process for patrons to select preferred hold pickup locations
- Identify method and schedule for transporting materials to/from partner locations
- During the pilot operations track visits to downtown library, visits to each holds pickup location, and library card holder penetration to understand impacts

Precedents

Anytime self service library including 24 hour holds, browse and borrow, and book returns.
https://www.fetechgroup.com/anytimeselfservice/#

Costs

See Appendix H for more information regarding the associated costs.

Adjust bookmobile service offerings and coverage in context of emerging needs

Why this recommendation?

Traveling downtown is often cited as a barrier to using the downtown library. Responses to the survey indicate that there is substantial interest in having library services outside of the downtown area.

The bookmobile currently provides services outside of the downtown area. However, bookmobiles are only able to offer a portion of the services that a permanent physical location can, and only for a short period of time each week at each stop. Bookmobile service is popular with the library patrons who use this service; however this is a small percentage of overall users (between 3.7 – 5.4% of total visitors over the past 3 years).

Ideas for implementation

"Satellite locations outside of downtown" and "pick-up spots for reserved materials at partner locations" are the most popular options for bringing library services outside the downtown area; with 51% and 48% of respondents selecting these in their top 3 in the survey. A smaller percentage (28%) selected "increasing the quantity of bookmobile stops in neighborhoods outside of downtown" in their top three.

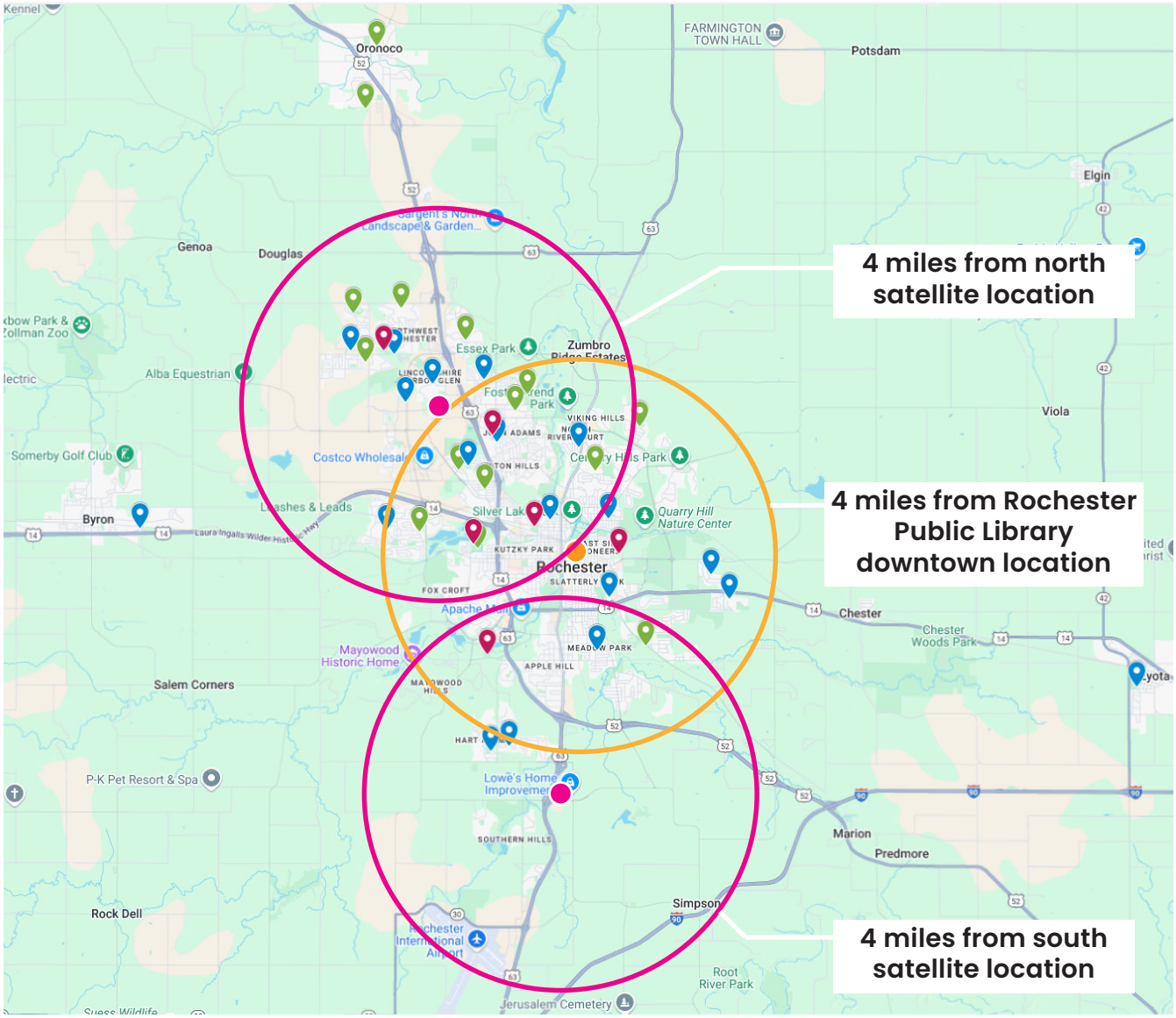
There are approximately 40 bookmobile stops in Rochester and the surrounding communities. Roughly half of these stops are located more than 4 miles from the downtown location. With satellite libraries in operation in north and south areas of Rochester all but 4 bookmobile stops would be located within a 4-mile radius of a library location. This would allow the library to reduce the quantity of bookmobile stops significantly; reallocating staff time to operating the satellite locations.

Costs

The current bookmobile is nearing the end of its service life and will need to be replaced in the coming years. Reducing the bookmobile service in areas near the downtown and satellite locations would allow the library to operate with a smaller bookmobile, resulting in $100,000 – 300,000 in operational savings. (Costs for a replacement bookmobile of a similar size are approximately $600,000.)

If it becomes infeasible to expand services with satellite locations or holds pickups at partner locations bookmobile service could be expanded. Staffing costs for expanded service are estimated to be $213,000. Additional bookmobile stops should be located in areas where the service reaches those who find it most difficult to use the downtown location.

RPL's bookmobile currently makes approximately 40 stops in and around Rochester.



Rochester Public Library Services Map

With satellite locations at the north and south sides of Rochester, only 4 of the existing bookmobile stops would be further than 4 miles from a library. Currently 14 stops are further than 4 miles from the downtown location.

Renovate the downtown library with user-centered focus

Why this recommendation?

The current downtown library has value as a civic and community hub, especially as the plans for downtown investment, notably Destination Medical Center, get realized. The building is in good condition for its age and worthy of investment to better serve modern and future library needs. With careful reorganization to utilize available square footage for its highest and best purpose, and targeted refresh of key areas, the building will be a very important tool in the library's service delivery toolkit for decades to come. This plan's suggested updates prioritize accessibility, clear wayfinding, improved user experience, staff oversight of public spaces, and efficient workspaces. Given the volume of comments RPL has received regarding access difficulties, both during this study and prior to it, this plan recommendation is to move forward with the short-term (Improve Access) bundle of work in its entirety as soon as is practical pending funding availability.

Ideas for implementation

Foundational work must be done to position the library for additional funding (e.g., strengthen relationships with elected officials, public awareness of the value to them of investing). Therefore, this report lays out suggested improvements in three categories: the first two are short-term needs related to accessibility and midterm needs that will improve the library's ability to provide next-generation library services and desired programmatic changes. The third category includes investments that reflect community desires, will cement the library as a downtown destination—and likely require private dollars to augment public funding available to the library.

Improve Access

- Improve level one entrance experience, including lighting and site improvements, accessibility updates to main entry doors and lobby area, new larger elevators.
- Renovate existing level one public restrooms and add new single-user restrooms and a sensory room.
- Revert meeting room on level one to public use.
- Revert staff conference room on level two to public use.
- Rebuild monumental stairs to accommodate modernized elevators.

Improve User Experience

- Reconfigure shelving and furniture in public spaces on both levels.
- Update finishes and furniture in public spaces on both levels.
- Create new study and meeting rooms.
- Renovate Teen Space.
- Relocate existing Friend's store; renovate existing space for public use.
- Reconfigure staff space near Skyway into public space, including adding glass partition to skyway for visibility into the library. Reconfigure Friend's storage and Periodicals area to accommodate relocated staff space.

Community Wish List

- Add skyway entry at level two, including full renovation of existing southern staff space into public space
- Renovate Children's space, including adjacent staff spaces to create more efficient workspace
- Create rooftop addition, including occupiable outdoor event space and green roof

Costs

Costs will vary based on timing of projects (due to escalation) and bundling of projects to maximize ability to gain efficiencies in scope. The below states ROM range of costs for each grouping of recommendations.

Short-term | Improve Access
Construction Costs: $2,723,000 (2025 dollars)
FF&E and Soft Costs: $1,167,000 (2025 dollars)
Operational Costs: no impact

Midterm | Improve User Experience
Construction Costs: $6,338,200 (2025 dollars)
FF&E and Soft Costs: $2,716,400 (2025 dollars)
Operational Costs: no impact

Longterm | Community Wish List
Construction Costs: $8,885,700 (2025 dollars)
FF&E and Soft Costs: $3,808,100 (2025 dollars)
Operational Costs: $343,000 per 12-month period (2025 dollars)

See Appendix H for more information regarding the associated costs and the underpinning assumptions for improvements that informed them.

Deferred maintenance work identified for the completion between 2029 and 2032 is included in the "2025 Library Facility Condition Assessment" prepared by Kraus-Anderson for the City of Rochester.

There is some overlap in the deferred maintenance scope and in the short-term and midterm recommendations of this report. For maximum efficiency it is recommended that these scopes of work are incorporated into a single project.

This plan identifies updates that would improve both accessibility and user experience.

Implementation Schedule

Implementation schedule

This multi-year funding strategy leverages a combination of city investment, foundation support, community philanthropy, and strategic partnerships to fund both immediate priorities and long-term capital needs.

Year 1

In Year 1, the library should work with the City to secure 50% of the cost for a two-hour free parking program from the City's parking fund, using the Library Building Fund to cover the remainder. While implementing this pilot, the library should begin targeted donor cultivation and grant research to position itself for upcoming projects. This includes identifying sponsors such as the Mayo Clinic, engaging the local community foundation, and seeking corporate partners who align with the library's mission. The goal in this first year is to build relationships and secure commitments that will be critical for funding satellite branches and future capital work.

Years 2 - 3

Years 2–3 will focus on launching two satellite branches. Funding for these projects should be structured so that Friends/Foundation contributions are split evenly between the two locations and matched with corporate sponsorships, philanthropic grants, and other community-based support. Potential partnerships could include in-kind lease arrangements—such as securing $1/year rental agreements—or donated space from local organizations. The Friends/Foundation should commit to holding their contributions over two years to build a combined $600K fund that can serve as matching dollars. During this same timeframe, the library should also begin Phase I of the downtown library remodel, funded through the City's CIP program, with additional support sought from ADA grants or other competitive matching grant programs. If the City considers issuing a bond in the near term, combining funding for Phase I and Phase II of the remodel could result in cost efficiencies.

Years 4-6

By Year 4, the library should be ready to launch a major capital campaign for Phase II of the downtown remodel, targeting a funding mix of 20% private fundraising and 80% through a city bond or tax increase. This campaign should be supported by the donor cultivation work done in earlier years and can be bolstered by offering a substantial matching gift commitment from the Friends/Foundation's funds.

Years 7-10

In the years leading up to Year 10, the library should collect and report detailed usage statistics from the satellite branches to demonstrate their impact and community value. If demand remains high, Year 10 may change focus from adding a bookmobile and expanded holds pick-up service to new branch locations. If the data still indicates a need for developing these services, the library should consider grants and partnerships to provide this service. At every stage of this plan, the library should ensure strong coordination between the Friends/Foundation, city leaders, and community partners, with consistent reporting to demonstrate impact and maintain momentum for each funding phase. The library should prioritize community outreach and partnerships with the Friends and Foundation to enable them to cultivate donors and build relationships, ultimately fostering the development of funding and partnerships.

Implementation schedule

Recommendations	2025 Costs	YEAR 1 2026	YEAR 2 2027	YEAR 3 2028	YEAR 4 2029	YEAR 5 2030	YEAR 6 2031	Proposed Funding Sources
	Estimated Inflation	1.06	1.12	1.18	1.22	1.26	1.3	
Two Hours Free Parking for Library Users								
Capital Funding Needs	$0							Shared between Library Building Fund and City's parking fund
Operational Funding Needs	$90,000 - 165,000	$93,600 - 171,600						
North and South Satellite Locations (2,000 - 4,000 SF)								
Capital Funding Needs	$616,000 - 3,532,000		$665,280 - 3,814,560					Friends/Foundation contributions, corporate sponsorships, philanthropic grants, and other community-based support.
Operational Funding Needs	$1,388,000 - 1,694,500		$1,499,040 - 1,830,060					
RPL Renovation | Improve Access								
Capital Funding Needs	$3,890,000			$4,590,200				Rochester CIP program, ADA grants, and other matching grant programs
Operational Funding Needs	$0							
RPL Renovation | Improve User Experience								
Capital Funding Needs	$9,054,554					$11,770,920		Major capital campaign targetting 20% private fundraising and 80% through city bond or tax increase
Operational Funding Needs	$0							

Notes

1. This worksheet places projects by priority of community need. Actual order of projects should be discussed each year in context of available funding and potential shifting of needs.
2. Inflation is estimated to be 6% for Years 1-3 per city staff input. Inflation is normalized to the 4% historical average for the longer term. This figure should be adjusted as market conditions change.
3. Capital costs include construction costs, soft costs, and FF&E. Refer to Appendix H for additional detail.
4. Operational costs are calculated for a 12 month period and include costs related to staffing, program supplies, vehicles, rent, utilities, etc. Refer to Appendix H for additional detail.