

2014 FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK SUMMARY



Westborough Public Library Focus Group Feedback Summary

Library consultant Kim Bolan Cullin facilitated twelve (12) interactive focus group sessions for the Westborough Public Library (WPL) on October 6, 2014. Overall, 78 stakeholders participated in the discussions regarding the future of WPL. Stakeholders included the community leaders, senior citizens, high school students, parents, local business professionals, educators, Friends of the Library, other members of the general public, the library board of trustees, and staff members. Participants included a mix of frequent library users, infrequent users and non-users, and ranged in ages and backgrounds.

The primary purpose of these sessions was to 1) show the community the possibilities for WPL as a thriving 21st century library, and to 2) gather the participants' feedback and insights as context for the WPL's building plan which will be submitted to the state for a construction grant.

In addition, from October 6, 2014 through October 26, 2014, WPL conducted an online survey to gather additional feedback. Altogether 194 surveys were received. The survey results provided some helpful information even though many of the respondents did not have the benefit of the consultant's focus group presentation and discussion. Online survey participants were predominately library users with 97% being library cardholders and 78% being regular library users (once a month or more).

The following includes a summary of responses from all focus group sessions divided by the primary areas of discussion. Online survey results were summarized and presented to the WPL leadership in a separate document.

1. Collections:

A. Types of Collections

- There is an overall good satisfaction level with the existing breadth and availability of collections. The ILL features of the regional system are clearly also helpful in insuring availability of most all collection needs/desires.
- Generally broad satisfaction with the e-book offerings though many would like even more availability and easier access (especially the senior citizens in the community who are high users of e-books once they get over the technology hurdle. This is because they are easier to hold and adjustable font sizes make them easier to read).
- Overall, there was a good variety of people who read print and people who read eBooks.
- Some felt that the Local History collection is an extremely important resource. A large percent don't use the collection, but still think it is important to the community.
- Strong resonance across many groups to adding a Cake Pan special collection.

- AR Level labeling extremely helpful to kids and parents but it could be made even easier (per the user)

B. Access to Collections

- Lots of comments about materials on top and bottom shelves still being a problem.
- Need more (and larger) way finding and signage to help user navigate to right area
- More/better lighting in shelving areas would be nice
- Overall layout, organization, and placement of the collection need to be rethought and improved.
- Some feel the collection areas are too cramped/compact
- Many use the self-serve holds and really like that convenience, however MANY raised issues about the anonymity of the holds. Even when alerted to the option to add an alias (a newly available option with Evergreen) many felt that opting into anonymity was far LESS desirable than having a coded system. Discussions often went to the practice of coding to the first letter of the last name and then the last 3-4 digits of their library card number.
- There were a few questions about libraries still using the Dewey Decimal System for nonfiction and why. A few raised the question as to whether students were even still being taught how to use Dewey in schools. Several people like the idea of a browse able collection but that also uses Dewey Decimal.
- Many comments were made about difficulty in browsing and finding items on their own, though nearly all stated that the staff members were absolutely fabulous and helpful with whatever needs they ever have.
- Several said they don't browse at the library because it isn't conducive to it.
- Several gravitated to books being more browseable and organized by topics. A few like author collections together in one location (Fiction).

C. Shelving and Arrangement

- Bottom shelves of existing shelves are too low for many users and top shelves are often too high.
- Many would like the shelves to just be lower to avoid the bookshelf canyons that currently exist within the library.
- The vast majority liked the idea of more face out display, especially the flip-thru shelving for kids/picture books.

2. Service Options:

A. General:

- The overwhelming majority positively commented about WPL being a community and cultural gathering place. A few commented that it is a natural place for literacy of all kinds.
- Most in the focus groups commented that the staff at WPL was great and very helpful when help is sought.
- Many would like the ability to eat and drink in the library, within reason or at least within designated areas.
 - A few people said something along the lines of: “I want to say to my friend, let’s meet at the library for coffee!” Though nearly everyone agreed that adding Vending options in the library (drinks, snacks, and/or coffee) would be likely a more successful option than trying to add a café.

B. Customer Service:

- Overall, the majority said that the staff is wonderful and had high praise for circulation, reference, and children’s staff.
- A few didn’t see the benefits, but the majority of participants like and see the benefits of adding additional supported self-check as long as staff members are readily available as needed. Participants especially like this idea if staff can be re-directed to other important tasks/services such as programming, technology instruction, and improving customer service.
- Several said they would love it if staff were more readily available and not always at desks. They want personal service. They said, “We feel more free to ask for help when the staff are out in the library space.”
- A few suggested that the library have an orientation for new WPL patrons—
NOTE: A best practice when possible is to offer a library “walk through” where staff tour users and tell them about services. A printed handout on rules and procedures, etc. is also helpful if it doesn’t already exist.
- Most users want to be able to talk in the library without being shushed (i.e., students who want to work together on projects, etc.), however there were a small (but vocal minority) wish for the quiet libraries of the past. The overall sentiment of all the groups however supported the more open and “active” library, as long as there are designated quiet areas.
- Staff suggested that ideally there would be a staff member stationed behind the scenes fielding inbound calls to the library.

C. Marketing:

- One of the biggest discussion points in every focus group was the lack of successful marketing done by WPL (NOTE: this is the most common issue with nearly every library we work with). This was evident based on the number of participants that don’t know about basic services provided by WPL. Several participants also commented that WPL offers a huge amount of services that the community does not know about.
 - A few people asked point blank, “How do people find out what is going on in the library?” NOTE: The consensus answer seemed to be that if you don’t come into the library, read the newsletter, or proactively connect to the website, it’s hard to find out.
 - Particularly noted was the low awareness and so far usage of the Digital Makerspace.

- Many said there needs to be more than posting on the website, hanging posters, etc. Need more outreach into the community!
- Another frequent comment was the need for an “All Community” calendar. The library might be the ideal choice to take the lead here.
- Several participants inquired about how they would find out about the results of the focus groups, the strategic plan, etc. **[CONSULTANT’S NOTE: This is very important and needs to be further discussed with the Director and Library Board.]**
- Only a few seemed to be aware of WPL’s Facebook page, but those who were claimed to be followers and found it to sometimes be a good way to find out about what was going on at the library.

D. Programming:

- The children’s program schedule seems to many to be very limited and not convenient to families with working parents.
- Several talked about developing more partnerships with individuals and organizations to assist in offering more program offerings. For example, partner with the YMCA, Ivy Tech, Local Farmers Market, individual storytellers in the community, etc.
- Many people would like to see more teen and adult programming, especially hands-on and how-to.
- Would like to see more advanced level classes, not just beginner level. For example, computer classes, genealogy classes, etc. It seemed understood that the librarians wouldn’t be able to provide all of this training but that there existed people in the community who would be experts and would be willing to share/lead these programs.
- A technology mentoring program was discussed at several sessions, where volunteers from the community would help others with learning how to use e-readers and other basics of tech devices, in a more one-on-one way.

Computers & Technology:

- The majority feels that technology is very important to themselves and WPL services.
- The single biggest technology problem in the library is the lack of available power outlets, and the placement of the outlets that are available. More power outlets and ideally power outlets in the tables and seating (when appropriate).
- Many commented they wished there were more computers to use.
 - Several would like to see laptops that could be used anywhere within the library.
- Currently no “good” places in WPL for collaborative computing (more than one person on a computer at a time).
- Many (but not all) expressed an interest in adding self-check to the library, as long as it’s support self-serve, and especially if it helps to alleviate some staff time that can be redirected into other areas.

- Universal excitement about the Digital Makerspace, and many asked how can the library build on that space not only in expanding its capabilities but even more so how can the library leverage more use and community engagement through that space.
- Many suggested the need to collaborate with higher educational institutions for advanced level classes.
- Many were interested in WPL providing technology trainings beyond computers. For example, GPS systems, cell phones, eReaders, etc. Have device training days.
- Many like the idea of having other devices available through the library and having a charging station(s) would be ideal.

3. General Physical Space:

A. Interior Layout, Furnishings and Decor:

- Whether wanting a more updated space or a more traditional-looking space, participants feel that WPL needs to be a welcoming space for all. Several said it's good to have spaces for different groups: young adults, children, adults, etc.
- Several said the existing library environment doesn't encourage the average person want to linger in the library. People want the library to be a space that people want to be in, with much more comfortable seating. Over and over it again: "Make the library more warm and inviting" or make it "Cozier".
- The side entrance seems to be disliked by most. According to many, it's awkward, messy, and just not inviting. One user worried that the pitch of the ramp was too steep for seniors.
- Overall, everyone agreed it's very important to people to have a good balance between active space and quiet space.
- More soft and comfortable seating is universally desired.
- Lighting is an issue nearly everywhere according to many. Lighting is bad, insufficient, and "cold" fluorescents don't make the space inviting.
- It was the feeling of most that the service points probably need to be combined and service desk should be smaller and less obstructive.
- Semi-private, collaboration space was very well received by the majority.
- Most said that signage is a problem throughout the library and it needs to be improved overall.
- Many would love to have eating and drinking space.

- The many teenagers who participated in sessions were very specific about their likes and dislikes related to the physical space. Suggestions for improvement included more color, better bookshelves, kids' art, better lighting, making an updated, happier and livelier environment.
- A variety of opinions on the space allocated to the Friends group and whether that is reasonable given the building constraints. Most seemed to feel that the Friends need to take a backseat on space allocation to other library needs. The members of the Friends group were adamant about their space needs and the "fact" that other options don't exist.
- Many expressed an interest in an elevated walkway/connector to the other public building across the street.
- The idea of having an outside "gathering" space was universally liked. The teen group, in particular, thought this would be popular and would help draw more teens into the library as a whole.
- Everyone acknowledges that parking is an issue. This isn't solely a library issue; it is an issue for the entire core village. Tearing down the Spurr House, a nearby building owned by the town, seems to be a popular choice for expanding parking.
- The space needs a significant increase in the number of powered outlets made available, and ideally the addition of device charging stations.
- Many felt that a "facelift" to the front of the building would help draw more users and also help set the tone for an updated interior. It wasn't suggested to completely change the look and design of the front but give it an update and freshening to make it more inviting and blend historic with an updated modern edge. Some felt that this could also incorporate with an outside gathering space as well.

4. Children's Services and Space:

- Many said the Children's Area has a lot of potential, but the majority of participants commented that services and space are geared toward babies and preschoolers and that services for 6-12 year olds is quite limited. Several also said the space is too formal for kids overall. Kids need an atmosphere to relax in.
- A few commented that the children's area needs a more vibrant colorful feel.
- The overwhelming majority commented that children and teens are the future of libraries and need to be made a priority.
- Most felt that the space needed a great deal more interactivity options. Trending towards the feel of children's museums with both passive and active manipulatives. More fixed tablets and digital interactivity devices as well.
- The space needs more face-out display so kids can make connection with their collections.
- Would like to see more public library participation in and collaboration with the schools especially during the summer reading program,
- Parents felt the kids' area needed some seating more appropriate to parents/adults so they can sit comfortably while their children are using that area of the library.

5. Teen Services and Space:

- A frequent topic of discussion was the need for a positive place for teens to hangout. The vast majority would like to see a more significant and teen space in the library.
- Most of the teens from the High School focus group didn't even know the library had an existing teen space (even some who were relatively frequent users of the libraries). Those teens ALL agreed that they would use the library much more IF there were a good inviting and interesting place for them to use (and hangout) at the library.
- Several students commented on needing even more of the quiet study carrels that now exist.
- Having active space and quiet space for teens is important. Having study areas for teens that they can reserve would be ideal.
- More awareness building of the digital makerspace is needed. Very few in the teen group were aware of its existence.
- Need more teen programming, in general, in order to draw them in. This is particularly true with Digital Creativity Space. There needs to be more programming for the resources in this space.

6. Meeting Space:

- Several commented that they love the large meeting space. It's critical right now with so much renovation going on with other public spaces in the town.
- The majority seemed positive about the library broadening the usage policies (parties, for-profit company usage) of the meeting rooms and charging rental fees when appropriate to create some income for the library to use in other areas, but ONLY if this didn't limit the usage of rooms by the non-profits in the community.
- There was some disagreement across groups as to whether MORE large meeting rooms will be needed in the library in the future or not (some confusion as to what new meeting spaces will be open to the public once the major town renovations projects are complete).
- All agreed that ideally the library should focus on small and medium sized meeting spaces given the space constraints of the building and the likely opening of new spaces in other public buildings. Spaces that allow for small group collaboration in particular were desired.
- Several would like WPL to add some more amenities to meeting spaces such as dry erase boards, fixed A/V, etc.
- Most would like to view and request meetings rooms online or via mobile devices.

Consultant's Summary – Space Priorities

In summary, below are the suggested space/facilities priorities, as translated by the consultants and as determined by the focus group participants. These priorities have also been weighed against the online survey results.

WPL Space Priorities
1. Warm, inviting space with a variety of comfortable seating.
2. Space and furnishings that support use of technology and personal devices.
3. Additional parking.
4. Interactive children's space for ages 0 – 12.
5. Quiet areas.
6. Improved computer/technology area.
7. Upgraded / improved teen space.
8. Individual workspace and study areas.
9. Small group collaboration spaces for 2 – 6 people.
10. Medium-sized meeting space for 10 – 30 people.