

Executive Summary – Oxford Public Library and Media Center

Background and Introduction

In 1784 with 28 members and an equal number of books, a subscription library was established to "promise Knowledge and Literature in the Township of Oxford..." It became a free public library in 1939 but had no permanent home until December 1970 when a colonial style



building was erected on Second Street through the bequest of Clyde Alexander in memory of his wife Katherine Bicking Alexander. Today, the Oxford Public Library has a patronage of over 9,000 and a collection exceeding 50,000 items. A small entrance addition was constructed in 2000 in order to facilitate accessibility. Because of the burgeoning and diverse growth of Oxford since 2005, physical expansion is necessary to ensure our Oxford Public Library's continued quality of services for generations to come.

The proposed Master Plan and Expansion Design consists of a new addition, a renovation to the existing library building, and significant site

improvements. The design team of SMP Architects worked with the Library Director and Board of Trustees to set design goals that reflect the Library's Mission Statement to "provide welcoming spaces for community interaction, access to information and lifelong learning." These goals follow:

- ***To support the current and future programs of a 21st Century library,***
- ***To foster community engagement, information literacy and lifelong learning for Oxford's increasingly diverse population,***
- ***To create an attractive, serene and environmentally responsible venue in the center of Oxford Borough.***

Existing Conditions

The existing Oxford Public Library is a split level building with an undersized elevator lobby that was added in 2000 to conform to Federal accessibility requirements. Upon entering one must use stairs or the elevator to arrive at either the main library at the upper level or the children's library and community spaces on the lower level. The lower level has limited connection to the outside with only a few small high windows on the west wall. There is little opportunity for interaction between the users of each space, a condition that the library would like to change.

The original main entrance to the building, via steps in a lobby located on Second Street, is currently used as a storage area. Outside, pedestrian and parking space is sorely limited. Cars and library users move through the parking lot together. The Library recently purchased a

portion of property along Second Street and a property to the rear fronting on Western Terrace in order to address the need for building and site expansion.

Master Plan

Through a series of design workshops, the Design Team and Library representatives developed the expansion plan. The plan features a multi-use new wing and entrance. The entrance link will serve as a main entrance and connector to the existing building, a gathering space for people, a gallery, and a link to the exterior spaces. Outside the building, the master plan proposes expand the parking space and take advantage of the access to Western Terrace. Rain gardens consisting of native plants and intended to sensitively manage stormwater will line the parking areas. The layout will allow two mature Oak trees on the Western Terrace property to be saved. An exterior amphitheater and proposed children's garden are also a part of the Master Plan.



Project Phasing

The project work will be completed in two phases. Phase 1 will include the building addition and work associated with relocating the children's library from the lower level to the upper level so that it will better connect with the new wing. The Phase 1 site work involves a new parking area, rain gardens, and associated plantings, and new entrance terraces. Phase 2 includes completing the renovation of the existing building, enclosing the original main entry portico and stair, and constructing a two story addition on the building's west façade. Site work on the north side of Phase I will open the existing lower level to the new amphitheater space. The lower level will subsequently be enabled to house community spaces and flexible functions. The amphitheater will connect to the rest of the site through an accessible path and series of steps and congenial exterior spaces.

Phase 1 Design

The work for Phase 1 has been developed to Construction Documents. The new addition will be clad in fiber cement siding and brick, have a metal gable roof and interior exposed wood trusses. The core library function will occur on the entry level. These areas will house much of the library's collection and climate controlled archives. The core space will provide for

individual reading and reflection, a flexible technology access (WI-FI) lounge, as well as a venue for concerts, lectures, and the many cultural events that the library hosts. A smaller shed roof structure on the south side will house staff offices, a small reading space, and restrooms. Its roof will be a vegetated “green” roof visible from Second Street and the new parking lot. It will reduce heat gain during the warmer months and mitigate “heat island” effect within the Oxford central business district.

The glazed entrance link will connect the core library addition to the existing library. It will serve as the LOBBY and HUB of the new library. Staff members will have a clear view of patrons entering and exiting the facility. High ceilings and display areas will provide a wonderful venue for the work of local artists. There will be a light filled stair to the lower level community spaces as well as a new elevator providing access to all levels. A wide “reading stair” will provide both a physical and visual connection between the core and children’s libraries. Here patrons will be able to sit and read or gather for meetings and presentations. The existing lower level will house community functions and allow access after regular library hours for evening community events and classes such as *English as a Second Language*.

New landscaped terrace areas, on both the east and west sides of the link between new and old will provide an inviting entry and gathering feature for the patrons. The 20 car parking lot will be on the southern property edge. A book drop will be located in the lot for quick returns. A second book drip will be located along Second Street. The site will include porous paving, rain gardens and native plantings, crucial elements in storm water management.

All design decisions have been driven by the three project goals identified above. These narratives, drawings, and estimates represent our vision for the Oxford Public Library’s future as a vibrant 21st Century Information and Learning Center.

Enhanced Broadband and Technology Goals

The Oxford Public Library and Media Center will increase public access computers from eight to twenty-four. The Center will provide for a Business/Research technology area, an enhanced Media and Screening Area, a Regional Art and History Research Area, and not less than twelve flexible use Laptop computers for public access.

In the Borough of Oxford (population 4,300) 68% of the population is estimated to be renter occupied. The portion of population who achieve education beyond post secondary is less than 6%.

The Library Media and Technology center model will provide:

- Sustainable mentoring and instruction for Social Networking applications,
- Competitive education opportunities for the underprivileged population,
- Community Activity space with technology-centered programming,
- Interactive broadband access to video conferencing and global outreach for author discussions, talks, cultural and social interaction.

Through networking applications such as *Skype*, library users will connect a rural Chester County Community with the world.