

Overseeing the Library Facility

By John Thompson, Director, IFLS Library System

As a member of a public Library Board in Wisconsin, you have a unique and sometimes confusing role when it comes to the library facility. Library buildings are acquired or leased by the municipality for library purposes; however, the Library Board has exclusive charge, control and custody of all lands and buildings obtained for library purposes. What does this mean for the Library Board and you as a trustee? The Library Board and the Director need to have plans both for the short-term and long-term needs for the library facility.

Short-Term

The library budget should include funding for snow removal, lawn care and landscaping, and regular interior cleanings. In addition to the ongoing upkeep, the budget should allow for routine building maintenance for electrical, plumbing, and HVAC systems as well as the yearly inspection requirements for elevators, fire suppression systems and extinguishers, and HVAC equipment. Additionally, the Director and Library Board should develop a budget schedule for such items as window washing and carpet cleaning that might only need to be done once a year or less frequently but are considered operational expenditures.

Keep in mind, some of these tasks may or may not be completed by municipal public works employees and the library may or may not be charged for those services.

Long-Term or Capital Improvements

This area is often where there is the greatest confusion for libraries and municipalities. The exclusive charge of the facility statement is sometimes interpreted to mean that the library needs to raise money to replace the roof or heating units. The municipality, however, owns the building and is the primary revenue source for capital projects. Municipal boards sometimes will say the library should fundraise for a new roof. However, donors do not want to give money for normal upkeep for a building. What is the solution to this confusion? The Library Board and the Municipal Board should reach an understanding of the short-term and long-term upkeep of the building. This can be an informal agreement or a more formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU provides a more stable understanding of the roles and responsibility and isn't subject to as many changes when individuals leave positions of authority.

The MOU should indicate who is responsible for short-term items and how to fund larger capital improvements. For example, the municipality is responsible for including the roof replacement in their capital improvement plan while the library and municipality will share costs for cosmetic improvements such as the carpeting and painting of the library.

The Library Board should maintain a capital improvement plan for the library that details the age and life expectancy of the HVAC equipment, roof, parking lot, and other capital items.

Planning for the future

Every 3 to 5 years depending on community changes and library service needs, the Library Board should review the current and future space needs of the library using a tool such as the [Public Library Space Needs: A Planning Outline](#) (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction) or utilize a study developed by an outside consultant or architect. Significant deficits in space may result in the need for a renovation, expansion, or new library facility. This review may also highlight how the current facility is hindering the implementation of the library's strategic plan.

In addition, a regular accessibility audit conducted by library staff or an outside agency should be done to ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Fiscal resources may need to be allocated to remedy any accessibility issues.

For more information consult your local system staff or the resources listed below.

Just for Fun

When traveling to different areas of the state, be sure to stop and check out newly built or renovated libraries to see what innovative ideas you can bring back to your local library.

Resources:

[Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Bureau of Libraries, Facility Management](#)

Resources on this page include samples of an Annual Building Inspection Checklist, Library Building and Grounds Survey, Capital Improvement Plan, Library Facility Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), and Library Maintenance Schedule.

[Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Bureau of Libraries, Planning and Evaluation](#)

Resources on this page include the 4th edition of [Public Library Space Needs: A Planning Outline](#) as well as the companion [Planning Space Needs Worksheet](#).

[Wisconsin Library Buildings & Spaces](#) (SEWI)

Resources on this page include [Facility Related ADA/Accessibility](#) resources.