

FLATHEAD COUNTY LIBRARY

KALISPELL BRANCH BUILDING PROGRAM



2025

Authors of plan: Flathead County Library Administration Commitment

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. OVERVIEW
2. CONSULTING AND PLANNING PROCESS
3. WORKSHOP OUTCOMES AND ACTIVITIES
4. ESSENTIAL SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE LIBRARY
5. SWOT ANALYSIS
6. COMMUNITY IMPRESSION OF LIBRARY
7. NON-PROFITS IN KALISPELL
8. SPREEDSHEET OF BUILDING PLAN
9. NARRATIVE OF BUILDING PLAN

Flathead County Library System Relocation and Building Program Overview

Introduction

The Flathead County Library System is preparing to relocate its Kalispell, MT location within the next eight years. After extensive searching, the Library Trustees have identified a promising property near the Downtown Mall, approximately half a mile from the current location. This site will help the library maintain a central downtown presence, provide convenient access to walking trails, and offer adequate parking. The Trustees are actively fundraising for the property purchase and the construction of a new library building.

Consulting and Planning Process

Beyond Stacks Consulting was hired in February of 2025 to complete three full day workshops with the management team from the Flathead County Library System. The following pages include copies of the documents created from the first two sessions and the building program, which used the format from part 1 of “The basics of Library Planning”. This publication is what the Library Trustees have been using and sharing with the staff prior to hiring a consultant.

The publication shared by the trustees points out the importance of experienced library staff to develop a program for the library including the physical characteristics of the space enumeration of. The content of the space, an estimate of the total sizes of the space, and the physical relationship of the spaces with each space in the library. The question the committee is trying to answer is “what is needed to run this new library”? The committee members should not be drawing spaces, that is the job of the architects; but members should be listing what is needed in the new space. This building program should be written by experienced library staff and a consultant with a master’s degree in library science not others who do not work in the library or the architects of designers.

During the first session, participants listed what services the library offers to the public. They brainstormed non-profits in Kalispell area that are available to partner with the library on programming and that may add value to the new library for programs and services. Weeding out services that other community non-profits perform better than the library and strengthen the programs that the library does in a superior manner. Discussions took place about the way the community describes that library, which can be done to change those views that are negative and strengthen the views the staff want to emphasize. The final exercise for the first session was a SWOT analysis, comparing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats provided to the staff and programming.

The group reconvened in April to continue working on preparation of the building program by evaluating the work from February and firming up the previous work.

Slides from the Missoula Public Library were shared to begin a discussion on what each department is looking for in the new building. Discussing the pros and cons of ideas being shared and how to make those ideas come true. This session left everyone with homework for the summer months. Each department would put their ideas, wants and needs on paper and meet with the consultant for 20 minutes at the September, meeting to firm up ideas before sharing with the committee. Discussion with the entire group would follow.

Workshop Outcomes and Activities

During the first session, participants:

- Identified services currently offered to the public.
- Generated a list of local nonprofits for potential programming partnerships, evaluating which services are best delivered by the library and which may be better handled by other organizations.
- Discussed community perceptions of the library, exploring strategies to address negative views and highlight strengths.
- Conducted a SWOT analysis, assessing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to staff and programming.

The group reconvened in April to review and solidify work from the earlier session. Slides from the Missoula Public Library were used to spark discussion about department-specific needs in the new facility. Each department was tasked with documenting their ideas, wants, and needs, which would be reviewed with the consultant in September before sharing with the full committee.

Essential Services Provided by the Library

- Access to Information: Free and private access for all community members.
- Electronic Services:
 - Scanners
 - Computers
 - Copiers
 - Internet/Wi-Fi and hot spots
 - Printers

- Business hub

Expertise:

Knowledgeable staff

Programming for all ages

Educational and reference services

Literacy tools

Job assistance

Accurate information delivery

Early childhood education, story times, and play

Readers advisory

Social Services:

Safe place and safety resources

Heating and cooling

Bathroom access

Meeting rooms

Opportunities for social connections

Community knowledge and referrals

Space for relaxation

Compassion and resources for change

Free Time Activities:

Free entertainment through books, music, DVDs, and other materials

Fun and creativity

Exploration opportunities

Use of the Libby app

SWOT Analysis: Kalispell Library

Strengths

- Strong leadership focused on progress
- Dedicated staff
- Robust collections
- Engaged users
- Supporting organizations, including Trustees, Friends, and the Foundation
- Consistent programming
- Strong relationships
- Stable budget
- Central downtown location

- Effective security practices
- Staff training

Weaknesses

- Limited space and facilities
- Narrow perspectives among users
- Unclear community support for the library
- Funding challenges
- National discourse regarding libraries' affiliation with ALA
- No space for Montana Collection
- Staff shortages
- Lack of a volunteer program
- Reputation issues
- Restroom limitations
- Need for increased security

Opportunities

- Hiring additional staff
- Expanding programming
- Increasing available space
- Adding computers and tech support
- Providing more locations for holds pick-up
- Constructing a new building
- Strengthening community relationships
- Building new partnerships
- Extending library hours
- Coordinating with external entities
- Fostering community unity
- Enhancing newspaper coverage
- Highlighting the value and quality of the library's presence

Threats

- Political divisions within the public
- Lack of financial and political support from the community
- Negative public image
- Unfavorable newspaper coverage
- Potential involvement in cultural conflicts

- Insufficient support from Commissioners
- Safety concerns
- Unstable funding
- Officials not supporting the library
- Threat of censorship
- Risks if relocation does not occur
- Parking and transportation challenges
- Difficulty changing public perceptions
- National trends influencing local attitudes

Community Impressions of the Library

Positive Impressions

- Welcoming atmosphere
- Appreciated programming, such as NASA events, button making, felting, food programs, and board games
- Versatile librarians
- Favorite library for many patrons
- Fondness for the historic building
- Friendly, knowledgeable librarians
- Relaxed environment
- Value of free services
- Prioritization of children's needs
- Ability to fulfill patron requests
- Free access to copies, scanning, printing, Wi-Fi, programming, meeting rooms, materials, hot spots, and telescopes
- No library card required for computer use
- No charge for meeting rooms
- High staff morale

Negative Impressions

- Questions about designated quiet hours
- Uncertainty about the library's relevance
- Insufficient meeting spaces
- Visible homeless population
- Concerns about safety
- Book bans by the Board

- Surprise at the library's high activity level
- Perceived decline in quality
- Staff morale concerns
- Long wait times for digital holds
- Comparisons to other libraries
- Lack of parking, especially for seniors
- Transportation issues in the valley
- Not enough computers
- Excessive noise
- Negative patron assumptions about library operations
- Assumptions regarding the library's move

Potential Nonprofit Partners in Kalispell

The following nonprofits, some of which have previously partnered with the library, represent potential collaborators for programming and community engagement:

- 4-H
- Agency on Aging
- AARP
- Abbie Shelter
- Assisted Living Center
- Avalanche Center
- BACC
- Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS)
- Boys and Girls Club
- CASA
- CFBB
- Chamber of Commerce
- Child Development Center
- Citizens for Better Flathead
- Code Girls
- Columbia Falls Historical Society
- Cry J
- DDC
- Family History Center
- Farmers Market
- Flathead Youth Home

- Food Bank
- Forest Service
- Foundation
- Friends of the Library
- FVCC
- Gateway Community Center
- Glacier Children's Museum
- Glacier Conservancy
- Glacier Institute
- GQA
- Head Start (childcare)
- Hockaday
- Humanities Montana
- Kalico Art Center
- Land to Hand
- Light House
- Logan Health
- MT State Parks
- Making Place
- MLSA
- MOPS
- MSU Extension
- MY Glacier Village
- Nate Chute
- Nurturing Center
- NV Music
- NW MT Museum
- Post Partum Resource
- Red Cross
- Robo Scout Squad
- Rotary
- Samaritan House
- Serious JuJu
- Sparrow's Nest
- Special Friends, Special Olympics
- Swan Valley Connections

- United Way
- VFW
- Veteran Food Pantry
- Warming Center
- Western MT Mental Health
- Wild Montana
- Wilderness Foundation
- **NONPROFITS IN KALISPELL** (* indicates libraries partnered with at some time)

THIS PORTION OF THE PROGRAM IS AN EXCELL SPREADSHEET. The file is meant to be a working schedule as plans get closer to meeting with an Architecture firm. A professional Library Architecture firm will save money because it is their expertise.

“See Excel spreadsheet”

Library Building Program Narrative

Administration and Support Staff (Second Floor)

The second floor should be dedicated to administration and support staff. Workspaces should feature sit/stand desks for employee health, and chairs must provide strong lumbar support.

The area will include a staff bathroom, Foundation Office, and a staff break room,

with required items detailed in the corresponding spreadsheet section. Any cozy furniture that is wanted is not planned currently. Architects will help plan those items.

Collection Services (First Floor)

Collection Services will be located on the first floor. To ensure efficient workflow and reduce repetitive stress injuries, this area should include a materials handling system, allowing staff to

focus more on user interactions. The space must not serve as a pass-through area, preserving concentration for cataloging tasks. Essential elements include:

- Loading dock for receiving and sending materials
- Shelving for partners' lids, crates, tubs, and lining bags
- Book truck storage
- Entry for outside book drop
- Three shared desks for staff assigned to this area
- Ample storage, including along the docking bay walls
- Staff Office
- Shelving for materials in cataloging
- Mail table that has room for the mail scale and sorting ingoing and outgoing
- Mending cabinet and workspace

The Youth Services area will sit proudly on the first floor, welcoming the community into a beloved new library. It will include programming space, all youth collections, children's staff offices, 3 study rooms, family bathrooms, a mudroom/stroller parking, aa comfort nook, sand an outdoor space facing the walking trail. This will be a vibrant and lively space on the first floor, placing the Young Adult area on the opposite corner of the first floor. Teens will welcome this area as their space, tucked away from other youth and adults. The Young Adlult collection will concentrate on fiction as most YA students use school libraries and adult collections for research. Public libraries no longer purchase YA non-fiction as it is expensive and sits on the shelf without being used.

Public computer use, the fiction and reference collection, a catering kitchen, event space for lifelong learning, adult interactive activities, the Montana Room and an outside deck will find their way into the rest of the space to round out the wonderful building plan created by the Trustees and Staff.

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