



A Rich History: Serving The Valley Since 1892

The history of Flathead County Library dates back to 1892, when the first public reading room opened in Kalispell. By 1897, the Reading Room featured 300 books and had hired a paid librarian, Mrs. Florence Madison. In 1901, a group of citizens applied to Andrew Carnegie to build a Free Library in Kalispell, early proof of this community's belief in public libraries.

More than 130 years after its founding, the Kalispell branch serves as the county-wide hub for our community. It has operated out of its current school district-owned building for 57 years. Registered cardholders grew from 34,302 in 2022 to 43,704 in July 2026, a gain of more than 9,400 patrons.

Supporting a Growing Community

Since 1969, the library has operated out of a leased school district building. That lease expires in 2033, and vital infrastructure is failing:

- Moisture and water intrusion have damaged interior spaces and walls
- Heating, cooling, and plumbing systems are inefficient and deteriorating
- Maintaining a 50-year-old elevator has cost more than \$50,000 in just the last two years

Roughly 800 people visit the library every day, despite the constraints of an aging, leased building. Our growing Flathead Valley needs a growing library. In recent years, the library has considered more than 20 locations, including renovating the current leased site. But shoring up aging infrastructure cannot be the long-term answer for our library. The time has come to act.

Taking the Next Steps Toward a New Kalispell Library

Our desired two- to three-acre parcel, part of the current Center Street Mall property, sits centrally in downtown Kalispell with direct access to the newly developed Parkline Trail. The project will provide:

- Space for a robust book collection with room to grow
- Full ADA accessibility throughout the building
- Dedicated library parking
- A purpose-built library that adheres to current codes and standards
- Cost-effective operations, reducing long-term maintenance burden
- A history room with public access to historical documents and local archives, which are currently stored off-site
- Faster, more reliable interlibrary loan and shared catalog access
- Expanded digital collections and technology
- Capacity for programs and activities that a maxed-out facility can't support today

When Bigfork's branch moved into a larger, remodeled space in 2024, it saw 7,416 more visitors (a 45% increase) and 13,788 more items checked out (a 49% increase) within two years.

Funding Structure

The library's funding strategy draws on multiple sources including public and private partnerships to make this project a reality:

Dedicated County Fund, as of 7/2026	\$750,000
Potential Grants	\$50,000
Designated Foundation Seed Gift	\$200,000 (committed)
Flathead County Library Capital Campaign Goal	\$13,000,000
Potential Bond	\$8,000,000 - \$14,000,000

Cost Estimates

Land Purchase (estimated)	\$3,000,000
Library Building Construction (40k - 50k sq.ft.) (estimated)	\$16,000,000 - \$25,000,000

Total Project Cost (estimated)	\$19,000,000 – \$28,000,000
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This estimate reflects a standard, functional library, sized and finished in line with comparable Montana library projects like Missoula and Bigfork. It is not a premium build.

Partnering with BrandRaise for a Campaign Readiness Study

Flathead County Library – Kalispell has partnered with BrandRaise, LLC to complete a Campaign Readiness Study assessing community interest in and philanthropic capacity for a \$13 million fundraising goal. The BrandRaise team will conduct virtual focus groups, 1:1 interviews, and a public online survey. No solicitation will take place during the Campaign Readiness Study. Recommendations will be presented to the Library Trustees, with the campaign proposed to launch following the study's completion.

This is not a new dream. It is a well-researched next step. In 1901, Kalispell asked a single donor to build its first library. Today, we're asking the Flathead Valley to build its next one.