STRATFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY
SPACE NEEDS STUDY

19 St. Andrew Street
Stratford, Ontario

Prepared for:

Stratford Public Library
19 St. Andrew Street
Stratford, Ontario
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May 6, 2003

Project No. 20245

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Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

E1.   The Ventin Group was asked to determine the space needs for the Stratford Public Library, and how they might be met.

E2.   We first examined strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

E3.   The core **strengths** of the Stratford Public Library are: the universal respect it has in the community; the services it offers; its prominent location; and its contribution to the vibrancy of the city core.

E4.   The **problems** are: perhaps coping too well, in that the problems listed immediately following have grown over many years and have been suffered more quietly than they might have been; a general constriction of space, with numerous specific inadequacies; a general under-provision of conditions for service delivery, with many specific examples; collision between activities; inaccessibility; (aging building infrastructure - electrical, plumbing, pipes, floors) and a consequent restricted future:

E5.   Considerable - and exciting - **opportunities** exist: to establish new standards; reinforce fundamental rights to information; provide increased space; rationalize space ; improve the quality of working space; deepen access to technology; enlarge the book collection; and permit greater personal contact. There may also be opportunities to use other spaces nearby;

E6.   We carefully reviewed planning documents and planning work already achieved

E7.   At present, the Stratford Public Library has 12,472 net square feet (17,202 gross square feet[1]). We assessed the future overall space needs of the Stratford Public Library, and reached the conclusion that, by all yardsticks, a reasonable projection of the overall space needs of the Stratford is:

- today: **19,000 to 20,000 efficient net square feet** (25,650 to 27,000 gross square feet) or sixty percent more than the existing);
- as a result of a substantial Library renewal (which would have to provide for the needs of the year 2,027): **22,500 to 30,000 efficient net square feet (or of the order of two to two-and-a half times the existing). 27,000 net square feet** (35,100 gross square feet) **is suggested as a space target.**

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[1]   throughout this report, a gross-up factor of 30 percent is used for the additional required area that is not included in the net functional area. This is discussed in more detail in the body of the report.

1.   **Background**

The community of Stratford is fortunate in being cohesive, having a long history, possessing a remarkably attractive and intact heritage downtown, and fostering North America's largest classical theatre company.

The Library has been part of this for a hundred years. It also is downtown, where it has been throughout the period, resident in an impressive building within a particularly important cluster of community structures. It has an unqualifiedly positive reputation.

Nevertheless, the present building, even with the 1974 addition, and even with ever more awkward juggling of new and old usages, is now seriously deficient in its ability to provide the services and programs needed and expected by the community.

In early 1999, the Library Board began spending at least one hour at each monthly meeting discussing the Library's current and possible future services, joined by a representative of the Friends of the Library. In September 1999, the Board formed a Planning Committee. It met biweekly until June 2000, and submitted its final report to the Library Board in August 2000. Following the report's acceptance, seven focus groups took place, involving the public and staff.

Out of all of this came priorities for programs and services:

- general information and leisure collections;
- basic and information literacy;
- lifelong/formal learning.

Also emerging was a serious concern as to space: Four options were proposed:

- maintain the status quo;
- remain in the library building with significant changes to the interior;
- create satellite locations;
- move to a new facility.

In August of 2002, the Library Board sought consultant assistance in the examination of its space needs and capabilities. After a public tendering process, it selected the The Ventin Group Ltd., Architects, to carry out this work. The study mandate is to define:

- what square footage is needed;
- what the capital costs of options to provide this square footage are;
- what the additional furnishing and Library materials are;
- what the additional operating costs are, *in particular*, staffing.

2. **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats**

2.1 *Strengths*

2.1.1 COMMUNITY RESPECT: The Library is highly regarded by the community, and heavily used by a large number of patrons, both adults and children. Similarly, the staff and the Director are highly regarded. The Library is considered to do a great job with children's programs. Even more outreach would be welcome.

2.1.2 SERVICES: The Library has done a very fine job of providing services generally, and of introducing new technology, especially for children. The Internet service is much praised.

2.1.3 LOCATION*:* The present location has a substantial number of things going for it. It is downtown. It is at a convenient location. It is a landmark. It is a facility with which the community is deeply familiar. The community is used to the present location. It is good for high school students, and for seniors. It has good connection to bus routes. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, *if* the Library could deliver twice the space with absolutely all that was being sought by the community in a Library, people would come to accept it at another location.

2.1.4 CITY CORE: The Library is viewed as an essential component of the City Core: Whatever emerges for the future, the Library is seen as inseparable from the core of the City.

2.2   *Weaknesses*

2.2.1   COPING: The Library has, for far too long, "made do," and has perhaps done it too well. As a result, it has become necessary to shine a spotlight on problems long in developing. The Library has truly far and long outgrown its space. Each year, it gets worse.

2.2.2   GENERAL CONSTRICTION OF SPACE: The truth is that, given the constraints and difficulties of the present building, the programs and services currently taking place ought to be less than they now are.

2.2.3   SPECIFIC INADEQUACY OF SPACE: For example, a defined area such as a story pit is required where children can sit and be read to; at present, there is no such space. There is programming throughout the year in the auditorium, but it is a dysfunctional space for such activities; not the least is that the materials and washrooms are on the bottom floor, and it is exceedingly difficult to keep running up and down between the two. Generally, the children's programming space is too small. A school class using the lower floor has to cope with bad ventilation and frequently a bad odour.

        There is not enough office space. Workrooms are very small; it is not uncommon to have 3 to 4 people in the basement workroom (the smallest in the building). The ergonomics are poor in terms of people standing /sitting at desks.

        There is a shortage of space for equipment.

        There is a shortage of off-desk space (all the staff have off-desk-area duties), and no space to keep materials for recycling.

        The present shipping and receiving areas are cramped and need to be larger.

        There is not enough space for custodial services.

        One-third of the auditorium is used for storage (the children's toy library, chairs and tables, because the materials have to be there on site, and there is nowhere else to put them.

2.2.4   PARKING is a considerable problem, and more is desperately needed. Considerable compromises were made at the time of the 1974 addition. 600 to 700 people come through the Library on a typical day. Standards suggest that 3 to 5 parking spaces should be provided per 1,000 square feet of library space. Lack of parking is the most frequently cited complaint.

2.2.4   GENERAL INADEQUACY OF CONDITIONS FOR SERVICE DELIVERY: The age, shape and crowding of the building spaces generally complicate and impede service delivery. Examples are: the placing of paperbacks on the bottom floor; the difficulties with handling recycling; the general lack of barrier-free access.

2.2.5   SPECIFIC INADEQUACY OF SERVICES: Children are of primary importance, and at present the Library simply can't meet the demand for programs; there are waiting lists. In particular, the lack of public washrooms on the upper floor is highly problematic, especially in regard to children's programming in the auditorium. Even those downstairs are not visible or convenient, have doors which are too heavy, and lack some diaper changing facilities. There is a total lack of barrier-free washrooms. Although the auditorium is used for children's programming and for meetings, it is relatively sparsely used. If it is retained, it needs coffee-making facilities.

The introduction of computers changed staff needs, and eliminated the general reading area. The configuration of computers needs to be examined here (as well as in the children's area). With the growing squeezing of space, adult services and children's programs have been eroded. The reinstatement of a relaxed general adult reading room is a priority. More adult services, more book-clubs, more emphasis on adult learning are needed.

One particular gap in Library services is the lack of a music listening area where patrons can hear CDs (and tapes) using headphones.

Every time new technology is put in, other space contracts (as exemplified by the loss of the general reading room and the contraction of the children's space).

It is not possible *both* to update the collection *and* keep books, because there is no room. Opportunities are being wasted because the community has grown and the Library can no longer provide the services needed. This affects attendance, it affects readership, it affects efficient and enjoyable use of the Library. Space is dictating the purchase and the release of stock. The Library is hampered by space in what it can buy; it has the budget, but no where to put the desired acquisitions.

The area in which withdrawn books are packed is cramped and possibly a fire hazard.

Staff movement is often difficult. For example, it is necessary to go through the auditorium to reach the computer room.

Storage has, as much as possible, to be other than in the Library building, causing inconveniences.

2.2.6   ACTIVITY COLLISION: At least the illusion of privacy is needed for reading and studying. This is difficult under the present cheek-by-jowl conditions. (Note, for example, at the Waterloo Public Library, the study desks ring the main area, and have a sense of separateness).

The move of some adult services to the lower floor - displaced by the introduction of computers on the main floor - has not been satisfactory; the moved adult services are too close to the children's activities and particularly the noise of the children. This noticeably deters some adults from going down to this space. Right next to the children's computers are HRDC computers, which is an unsatisfactory juxtaposition.

There are considerable problems with the children's area. Children working on computers like sound - noise - and this very much conflicts with the teaching environment. It is a particularly poor place in which to carry out programming. Added to this is the inappropriate juxtaposition of some adult services, there because it was the only place to put them. Generally, the two groups are incompatible in terms of their activities and needs.

Some better location has to be found for the computers; it is not presently possible to monitor the terminals for inappropriate use; and also, the noise from the keyboard used by adults encroaches on nearby readers.

The two most common complaints from patrons are: insufficient parking; and noise in the Library.

2.2.7   INACCESSIBILITY: Aspects of the current Library are inaccessible for some users. The bottom two stack rows are difficult to use for the short-of-sight, and the top two rows are similarly difficult for users under five and a half feet tall. The aisles widths are cramped.

2.2.8   RESTRICTED FUTURE: It has been asked: is it *really* possible to find 10 percent more space (or more) in a facility that is already crowded and cluttered. A minor amount of space could be obtained. However, investigation indicates that the amount of space needed for current standards greatly exceeds any amount of space that could be harvested within the existing library. "Producing an antique Library system in an antique building would be self defeating. Any solution to the future needs of the Library must be *radical*."[2]

2.2.9   BARRIER-FREE: Even though the existing building has been partially upgraded for partial barrier-free accessibility, the building is significantly lacking in barrier-free features (for example, existing washrooms).

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[2]   statement of an interviewee.

2.3   *Opportunities*

2.3.1   NEW STANDARDS: The objective is now for the Library to work to standards that
             will take the Library beyond its current level of service to one that will truly be
             excellent. The challenge now - for 2003 - is to generate a plan for the future which
             will celebrate the *next* 100 years.

             Standards which are universally used throughout the public library services come
             from the American Library Association, as well as from the Ontario Ministry of
             Culture Provincial Library Service Library Guidelines Accreditation Council.

             We need to ensure that we have not missed out on other, innovative services that
             other libraries are providing.

2.3.2   REINFORCING FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS: A principle behind the provision of Library
             service is that the facility is a refuge for all demographic components of the
             community, that it is a refuge, that it is a relaxing place, the only completely open
             door in the community.

2.3.3   INCREASED SPACE: Many people accept that the Library needs new and more space.
             The question is: how should it be provided? Suggestions to date in regard to the
             immediate and immediately adjacent site are:

             ● see if it is in any way possible that the 1974 addition is strong enough to
               support another floor. This is a key issue. Investigation indicates that it is not
               possible;

             ● expansion of the present building to the front (over the driveway); there may
               be room to go forward 20 feet. Investigation indicates that it is possible, but
               that it is not a reasonable solution, as it deletes the driveway, parking and the
               front yard plus bookdrop.

             ● acquisition of immediately adjacent property (the St. Andrew's Church and/or
               Manse);

             ● an arrangement to use the St. Andrews's large basement meeting room or
               other interior spaces for Library programming;

2.3.4   ELECTRONIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION: The introduction of computers, the
             explosion of information on the Internet, and the rapidly improving formats for
             information access have greatly increased expectations for services.

2.3.5   SPACE RATIONALIZATION: The Library has warehousing/storage off-site at 240
             Norfolk Street which can be brought into consideration in overall space planning.

             Space and Program Extensions: There certainly must be a space where patrons can
             sit, relax, and read. This is enhanced by the demographic trends, which show
             average ages creeping up.

Multi-Purpose Assembly Space: Central to the mandate of the Library is a space for programs for 50 to 100 people.

New Programs: The City is poorly provided with opportunities for adults to take study courses which are other than educational. More formal opportunities - and space provided for them - are needed.

A homework centre is needed; doing homework at the Library is a major activity which it is important that the Library encourage.

More meeting space for small groups is needed; the top floor meeting room is heavily used in the evenings.

Some very small spaces are needed for tutor and student one-on-one training.

Teenagers are a crucial group to keep involved with the socializing and learning and other experiential openings, which the Library should provide. They are a demographic component that libraries often find difficult to accommodate with ease. The Library does manage to attract significant teen usage. This could - and should - be expanded by providing a specially designated, and fairly separate space, with casual supports - for example, bean bag chairs and the opportunity to watch videos.

Space is definitely needed to provide literacy enhancement services.

2.3.6   QUALITY OF WORKING SPACE: Offices need to be environmentally better; all should have windows and good air quality.

2.3.7   TECHNOLOGY, BOOKS AND PERSONAL CONTACT: Although libraries are rapidly adding electronic information services, physical materials (books, periodicals) remain as fundamental services as ever. The Library has to walk the line between *technology* and the continuing desire for *personal contact and service.*

2.3.8   POTENTIAL USE OF OTHER SPACES NEARBY FOR PROGRAMMING: The City Hall auditorium is virtually unused. Similarly, the basement room of St. Andrew's Church might be available for program rental. It is noted that St. Andrews has recently made a 2-year commitment to SAIL (Stratford Access to Independent Living) for a small part of its facilities.

In terms of alternate physical solutions:

- the Jail has been suggested (though many historical supporters would demand that the building be kept, and it is a warren inside). There are mixed messages as to whether or not the Jail will ultimately be available;

- the basement auditorium of the Masonic building. Its approximately 4,000 square feet is insufficient space to meet the need demonstrated in Section 4 below;

- one or two satellite libraries (at the West and/or East ends). The idea was rejected in a 1991 consultant's study. Providing a reasonably full range of services and programs in a satellite Library would be operationally expensive and would dilute the depth of service provided. Moving a specific department out of the main Library would prove awkward for Library users. The Library would likely disperse 25,000 volumes to a satellite location. But, satellites are very expensive to operate.

If a satellite were to be opened, there would be a number of options to consider:

i)   hiving a service off, such as computers or children's services. If this were to be done, there would be a negative overall impact, since the present Stratford Public Library building is family oriented. Use by either or both children and adults could fall off. Even if computers are moved to a satellite, and some congestion was thereby relieved, the main building would still need full Internet services.

ii)   having a small branch with a small collection of books. This approach would simply create both duplication of a portion of the Main branch collection, and frustration, since the branch could not hope to cover the long-established needs of most patrons.

iii) moving programming space out. This would create severe logistical problems; it is already cumbersome having the children's collection on the basement floor and children's programs on the top floor.

Capital costs[3] associated with the creation of a satellite have been estimated at $200,000 for physical renovations and $100,000 for furniture and computer hardware and software. These costs relate to a 2,500 square foot satellite, which in no way meets the library's overall space needs. Even more of concern, there would be notable increases in operating costs, with replication of services, collection and equipment. These satellite operating costs would be of the order of $100,000 annually for staff, plus further costs for materials. The operating costs in the Main library would not decrease.

Thus, although a satellite might relieve some congestion in the Main library, it would do so with markedly reduced efficiency of service, higher operating costs for staff and materials, and the creation of even greater programming difficulties than at present. Satellite(s) are not a recommended solution.

2.4   Threats

If no action is taken, the Library will not be able to provide services and programming in keeping with other municipal services at a level the community has come to expect, nor to respond to emerging trends.

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[3]   studies carried out for an Information Commons by the Stratford Public Library

There are conflicting priorities for the City; considerable dollars are needed for municipal infrastructure; also, a community centre has been proposed.

Services which have already been curtailed are:
- reading room
- study space
- children's programming and reading area
- adult AV
- microfilm
- reference service desk
- display space
- stacks
- Chalmers collection

Services needed are:
- tutorial rooms
- homework areas
- staff work areas
- volunteer
- training space
- space for Friends and Foundation operations
- accessibility up to code
- user-friendly program space (e.g., washrooms, kitchen, seating, flooring)

3.0   **Planning Documents and Planning Work Already Achieved**

3.1   *The Planning for Results Report*

This identifies three prime service needs:

- the general information and leisure collection. the general collection consists of approximately 100,000 items (about 3.1 per capita), including adults', children's and theatre sections. The two most significant needs arising from this are expansion of the constricted children's area, and provision of a large, relaxed general reading room. Further, there is a widespread opinion that the collection should be expanded, and that the weeding rate should drop. More CDs are sought.

  More space will be needed for volunteers and for volunteer administration (fund-raiser, administrator, coordinator). Volunteers are increasingly rounding out the ability of the Library to provide services - to home-bound patrons, for example.

- basic literacy programs and literacy information. These require group and one-on-one training rooms.

- lifelong learning a) post-secondary, and b) working with the school system. The first needs more space, at tables and carrels and at computer stations. The second, given the crisis in the school system and the seemingly endless truncation of school services, means that the Library may well have to fill the gap. This in turn implies significantly more working space for children, a significantly larger children's collection, and significantly more staff time to monitor and assist children.

There are 5 post-secondary institution in the Stratford vicinity; a growing number of adults are working to get their second degree. Teleconferencing provision is an issue for such people.

3.2   *The City of Stratford Plan* A Community Vision for the 21st. Century*, July, 1997.*

This makes the following points relevant to Library planning:

- advances in communications technologies must become integrated into Stratford's day-to-day life;

- the Internet is especially important;

- the goal is a wired City (computer-based access to the Library, City Hall, mall, bus terminal).

3.3   *The Stratford Public Library Feasibility Study, July, 1990.*

    This report, which did not address overall space needs, found that:

- based on demographics alone, it is not possible to support a branch library as an additional component to the existing main library which already provides library services to the community;

- the library is adequately staffed, and has a healthy operating budget;

- a branch location would be too expensive.

3.4   *City of Stratford, Demographic Projections.*

    It is important to note that the 1991 report was dealing with a Stratford population of 26,000. Currently, Stratford has a population of 28,000. Current projections are that (per the Official Plan), Stratford's population will be 37,500 by 2027 (25 years from now), at the currently used growth rate of 0.6 percent per annum. This represents a population increase of almost *42 percent* over 1991 and *34 percent* over today.

3.5   *General Library Standards.*

    Using the generally accepted standard of 0.6 net square feet for provision of public library space per capita:

- the Library needs 16,800 net square feet today;
- the Library will need 22,500 square feet in 2027;
- the Library has 12,472 net square feet currently.

3.6   *The Stratford Public Library Planning Committee work and report, and focus group work and reports, 1999/2001.*

    This major undertaking by Library staff and many members of the community found that "considerable compromises have been made to provide modern library services in a seriously outdated space." It concluded that it should consider four options. They were:

- maintain the status quo; remain in the current building with no significant changes to the building or currently provided services and operations;
- remain in the library building with significant renovations to the interior;
- create satellite locations;
- move to a new facility.

    It concludes that only the fourth option permits the Library to implement its plan, solve existing problems and offer the potential for generating revenue through instruction workshops, room rentals and paid parking.

4. **The Future Overall Space Needs of the Stratford Public Library**

The central issue is: how much space will the Stratford Public Library need to provide appropriate services and programs to the public, and what are the ways of defining this space need?

The question can be approached in a number of ways:

4.1 *Recognition of the True Nature of the Present Space Base*

As is clear from the previous sections, the present space of the Library is dysfunctional for several reasons: the limitations of a 19th. century design; building additions constrained by the property lines; and operation on 3 floors. It is rated at 12,472[4] net square feet. However, 12,472 net square feet in a modern, efficient library building would likely be on one floor (certainly not on three) and would be able to provide a significantly broader and deeper level of service, due to:

- as previously noted, avoiding the disconnection between functioning parts of the library (for example, the difficulty of putting on children's programming on the third floor when the washrooms and the materials are on the lower floor);
- avoiding the crowding of services up against each other as the addition of new services has had to be made less than completely efficiently, and to the detriment of adjacent services;
- ensuring that each space was fully functional; for example, the auditorium on the third floor is considerably underutilized; and when it is utilized, it is often not a completely appropriate space for the program taking place;
- being able to define spaces that fitted needs, rather than having to cope with the constraints of the structure of an old building.

Thus, the present Library space is distinctly *less* than 12,472 *efficient* net square feet.

4.2 *Application of Ontario Library Standards*

In 1970, the Ontario Library Service established a standard for Ontario communities that said communities should provide in public library space 0.6 square feet per member of the community in the area served.

The following should be noted about this:

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[4]   source: Stratford Public Library, estimates based on physical measurements, 2001.

- the standard was brought in as an encouragement to communities, particularly those with sparse library service, to raise the priority given to public libraries. At that time, the electronic communications revolution had barely begun; even CDs did not exist. Since then, the full wave of VCRs, e-mail, the Internet, electronic research and information provision, as well as a still-changing variety of sound and visual packaging, has descended on the world like a tidal wave. Public libraries have fought to stay at the forefront of these information resources, while seeing no drop in the demand for their longer-rooted services. The notion of what a library can be and should do has steadily expanded.

The result today is that the 0.6 figure should properly be regarded, *at the best*, as a minimum figure. This is accentuated by the nature of the marked difference between the educational, informational, cultural and vocational needs of communities. Stratford is very much *not* a typical 28,000-population city. It has a much higher quality of community amenities and cultural life than nearly all other communities in its size range. This further pressures the 0.6 figure upwards.

The application of the Ontario Library Standards 0.6 square foot per population rule to the present population suggests that an **efficient 16,800 net square feet today** should exist to serve the present population of 28,000. Even using the 0.6 figure, recognizing the dysfunctional nature of the present space means that Stratford Public library should have approaching twice the efficient net square footage that it has today.

4.3   *Recognizing the "Step" Nature of Building Public Libraries*

Municipal libraries are usually built or substantially altered not more than every 25 years. (the last major addition to the Stratford Library was in 1974). Thus, a new or substantially reconfigured library should meet the needs of 2027. The City of Stratford planners estimate that the population of Stratford will be 37,500. Using the 0.6 rule implies that the Library will need **22,500 net square feet in 2027**. Recognizing that all the pressures on the 0.6 rule are upwards, the 22,500 net square feet figure must very much be regarded as a minimum.

4.5   *Application of American Library Association Standards*

The American Library Association is widely used by the public library community as an authoritative source for policy planning in Canada and the United States. The standards it has developed have been adopted by the Canadian Library Association. The recent work of the Stratford Public Library Planning Committee used the ALA *Planning For Results* workbook as a basis for formulating analyses.

Applying these standards to the Stratford Public Library, the attached bar graphs demonstrate space deficiencies in current key functional areas, as well as projecting space requirements to 2027.

4.6   *Summary of Overall Future Space Needs*

A reasonable projection of the overall space needs of the Stratford is therefore:
- today: **19,000 to 20,000 efficient net square feet** (or sixty percent more than the existing);
- as a result of a substantial Library renewal (which would have to provide for the needs of the year 2,027: **22,500 to 30,000 efficient net square feet (or appreciably more than twice the existing).**
- the target of **27,000** net square feet (35,100 gross square feet) is recommended.

APPENDIX

Methodology

Review of the extensive planning already carried out by the Stratford Public Library
Interviews
Development of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
Development through several iterations of a Space Needs Report.

Contacts

These included:

Karen Haslam, Mayor
Charlene Gordon, City Councillor
Jim Chapryk, City Councillor
Keith Culliton, City Councillor
Ron Shaw, City CAO
Sharon Malvern, President of the Stratford Public Library Foundation
Jo Deslippe, Business Development Strategies
Karen Horst, Minister, Knox Presbyterian Church
Members of the Library Board
Members of the Library Planning Committee
Members of the Library Staff