Multnomah County Library
Strategic Vision Workshop

The Workshop

On October 25, 2016, Multnomah County community leaders, Library staff and stakeholders, and representatives from local public agencies, private businesses, and non-profit organizations gathered to explore two challenging prompts:

• what will be the future needs of the diverse residents, employees, and organizations of Multnomah County, and

• what role will the Multnomah County Library (MCL) play in meeting those needs, especially for underserved communities?

The workshop was coordinated by Group 4 Architecture, Research + Planning, Inc., a firm helping libraries develop visions and plans to create and support vibrant, sustainable, and more equitable communities. The workshop participants collaborated throughout the day on a series of focused activities to brainstorm and develop ideas, and to support visionary thinking on the future of the Multnomah County Library. Participants were invited to approach each activity through four conceptual lenses: Place; Access; Service; and Equity.
After the opening activities, participants took part in a “metaphors” brainstorming exercise that examined attributes and perceptions associated with a wide range of brands, services, and institutions. Working in small groups, participants discussed how the characteristics of local and national brands, destinations, services, and organizations might apply to a future library’s qualities, according to the Service, Access, Place, and Equity lenses. The small groups then combined their top metaphors to describe hypothetical future libraries. Each of the five future libraries was named by its group and presented to the full workshop.

Despite representing a great range of physical, virtual, local, and national sources, the hypothetical libraries resonated around a few recurring concepts through multiple lenses.

- **Personal.** Diverse entities from Netflix to PSU are increasingly providing service tailored to individual customer profiles. Such providers use intuitive, accommodating platforms to offer customized content drawn from a broad base of services with “something for everyone.”

- **Boundless.** Whether groups preferred the term “ubiquitous,” “24/7,” or “free,” the importance of having universal on-demand services was highlighted repeatedly.

- **Diverse.** Whether a wide selection is desired to meet unique customer needs or to offer more robust opportunities for exploration and exposure, participants envisioned services that capture the great diversity that the world and Multnomah County have to offer. The Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI) in particular demonstrated how dynamic exhibits can engage and delight patrons, while promising new directions.

- **Connected.** Like social media, future libraries were envisioned as venues for connection – but this vision is not limited to online spaces. Farmers markets and food trucks are examples of bringing communities together to take inspiration from.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Portals to Possibility</strong></th>
<th><strong>Connection, Content, Community For All</strong></th>
<th><strong>Your Service, Your Way, Your Place or Mine</strong></th>
<th><strong>The Open Door</strong></th>
<th><strong>The Stars Are the Limit</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue Apron</td>
<td>Portland Int’l Airport</td>
<td>Amazon.com</td>
<td>Bike share</td>
<td>OMSI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishment / “Gateway” self service</td>
<td>Proud</td>
<td>Precise service 24/7</td>
<td>Ubiquitous / in the right places</td>
<td>Hands-on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>Reflects community</td>
<td>No hurdles</td>
<td>Maintained</td>
<td>Boundary breaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimulating</td>
<td>Clean</td>
<td>Service right to you</td>
<td>Self service</td>
<td>Distributed venues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inspiring</td>
<td>Supportive, deductive</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dynamic, rotating exhibits for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REI</td>
<td>Farmers Market</td>
<td>Powell’s / REI</td>
<td>Uber</td>
<td>Netflix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventuresome</td>
<td>Curated</td>
<td>Local, personal</td>
<td>Available when needed</td>
<td>24/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intuitive</td>
<td>Personalized</td>
<td>Immediate</td>
<td>Transparent, simple</td>
<td>Personal, custom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledgeable</td>
<td>Local, sustainable</td>
<td>Ubiquitous</td>
<td>Customizable</td>
<td>Family accounts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big inventory at a destination location</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>24/7</td>
<td>Accommodating</td>
<td>Multiple media / platforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Venue for connection</td>
<td>Good wayfinding!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Nike</td>
<td>OMSI</td>
<td>Food trucks</td>
<td>OMSI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connected with place</td>
<td>New, fresh</td>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>Hyperlocal / place based</td>
<td>Dynamic / changing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ubiquitous</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Diverse, reflects community</td>
<td>Accommodating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive/evolving</td>
<td>Innovative</td>
<td>Hands-on</td>
<td>Resourceful</td>
<td>many user groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>No boundaries</td>
<td>Iconic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Strong local brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inter-generational</td>
<td></td>
<td>Infused with users’ energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powell’s</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>Netflix</td>
<td>PSU</td>
<td>Home Depot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something for everyone</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>On-demand, mobile</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>Welcoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events by age, interest</td>
<td>Multicultural/diverse</td>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>Cultivates potential</td>
<td>Resources provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of experiences</td>
<td>No barriers</td>
<td>Personally relevant</td>
<td>Flexible / accommodates all people</td>
<td>to match inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-navigable</td>
<td>Venue for connection</td>
<td>Diverse content; for everyone</td>
<td></td>
<td>Classes for personal development</td>
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</tbody>
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Lunchtime was accompanied by three presentations that together established a compelling context for the Vision Workshop’s collective effort. Multnomah County Chairwoman Deborah Kafoury and Director of Libraries Vailey Oehlke established that MCL was entering a “new chapter.” The library is applying its mission of creation and learning to a social landscape of rapidly shifting community needs and demographics, population growth, and swift technological advances that have unlocked new ways of learning, interacting, and collaborating.

Vailey highlighted the new flagship library of Aarhus, Denmark. Dokk1 is a 380,000 square foot library / performance space / civic center / playground / transit hub of infinite flexibility. The building is symbolically and physically connected to the city’s prosperity...including a tall chime that sounds with every new baby born in the city. Dokk1 offers a bold example of what’s possible when inspiration looks beyond our most apparent horizons, which libraries should invariably encourage us to do.

David Schnee, Principal of Group 4 Architecture, considered how these perspectives represent a redefinition of library space. Certainly, libraries will still be places for books, but more essentially they are places for people, and their varied interests, from reading alone to collaborating, to virtual interaction. Libraries are also now more prominently places to create – in this regard, libraries hold seemingly boundless possibilities. As places to freely gather and relax, libraries invite visitors to feel comfortable lingering, and socializing.

Libraries are places for celebrating who we are. As Dokk1 demonstrates, libraries should reflect and connect their communities while also retaining the flexibility to evolve alongside them.
For the second half of the day, participants assembled in groups to brainstorm, rank, and present vision statements for Service, Access, Place, and Equity at MCL. The exercise uncovered a number of highly valued focus areas for future consideration:

**BRANCH OUT, REACH OUT**
- Create satellite locations shaped around specific community needs, including maker spaces, technology, collaboration space, etc.
- Provide automated, bike/walk friendly spaces open 24/7.
- Significantly expand library facilities in underserved east County areas.
- Increase engagement, outreach, and education; promote services in line with community needs.
- Partner with schools and other public organizations to create satellite and co-location opportunities reaching underserved communities to provide: access to facilities, information, economic development, empowerment, connectivity, assistance.

**CREATE DIVERSE, ACTIVE SPACES**
- Design libraries and library spaces to foster communities, celebrate and host artists and events, and serve as gathering places for every generation.
- Have flexible spaces that can be easily changed up, short and long term, for creation, learning, events, gatherings, etc.

**BUILD EQUITY**
- Build digital equity through provision of devices, Internet, tech education, and assistive technology.
- Establish environmentally forward thinking libraries that build community resilience and impact people’s lives.
- Invest in areas of greatest need.
Next Steps

Multnomah County Library will take the concepts and findings of this Strategic Vision Workshop, along with extensive community and staff input, into consideration for future facilities, services, and long range planning. This work will result in a master facilities plan to be presented to the Multnomah County Library District Board for consideration.
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Participation

Multnomah County Library would like to express its gratitude to the many community members, stakeholders, and leaders for the generous contribution of their time and thoughtful participation in this workshop, as well as to the MCL staff and volunteers whose support and hard work helped make this event a success.

Valarie Pearce, Black Parent Initiative
Paul Coakley, Centennial School District
Ricardo Ruiz, City of Gresham
Karen Wackrow, Elders In Action
Patricia Rojas, El Programa Hispano
Jon Deitz, Friends of the Library
David Wark, Hennebery Eddy Architects
Meg Matsushima, Hennebery Eddy Architects
Traci Rossi, Innovative Changes
Alan Linhares, Lents Neighborhood
Brian Wilson, Library Advisory Board
Elizabeth Hawthorne, Library Advisory Board
Mardy Stevens, Library Advisory Board
Merris Sumrall, The Library Foundation
Wendy Wray, The Library Foundation
Andrew Proctor, Literary Arts
Anna Gordon, Living Cully
Tony DeFalco, MultiCultural Collaborative
Alene Davis, Multnomah County
Deborah Kafoury, Multnomah County Commission
Loretta Smith, Multnomah County Commission
Marissa Madrigal, Multnomah County

MeeSeon Kwon, Multnomah County
Dave Ratliff, MCL Central Library
Rachael Short, MCL Central Library
Vailey Oehlke, MCL Director of Libraries
Becky Cobb, MCL Director's Office
Katie O'Dell, MCL Director's Office
Shawn Cunningham, MCL Director's Office
Laura Bradshaw, MCL Fairview Library
Kelly Garner, MCL Human Resources
Concha Solano, MCL Kenton Library
Jen May, MCL Learning Systems
Gordon Long, MCL Midland Library
Lee Catalano, MCL Neighborhood Libraries
SyNova Blackwell, MCL North Portland Library
Mark Garber, Pamplin Media Group
Josh Mitchell, Phase2 Technology
Kathleen Holloway, Portland Community College
Sheila A. Martin, Portland State University
Frank Caropelo, Reynolds School District
Maripat Hensel, Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc.
Craig Gibons, Tax Supervising & Conservation Commission