

Pacific Grove Public Library Renewal Project: Long Overdue and Well Underway

“At its best, preservation engages the past in a conversation with the present over a mutual concern for the future.” William J. Murtagh of the National Register of Historic Places

The Pacific Grove Public Library (PGPL) has been directed by the City Council to embark on a strategic planning process, designed to generate recommendations for a renewal of our cherished Library. The Library Advisory Board, comprising volunteers appointed by the Mayor and Council to generate recommendations and advice to the City Council and staff concerning Library matters, has taken overall responsibility for developing the strategic plan.

The three general areas that the plan is addressing include: Historic Renewal, Collection Renewal, and Access Renewal. The progress made to date and projected next steps in each of these three areas is provided below.

Historic Renewal:

The historic renewal element of PGPL’s planning effort seeks to honor the beauty and history of the Library, including the original building and each of the subsequent additions. We are fortunate and proud to still have an original Carnegie Library building as the heart of our current Library. Thanks to a \$10,000 grant from Andrew Carnegie and a \$10,000 value land donation from the Pacific Improvement Company, the cornerstone of the PGPL was laid November 9, 1907 and the building opened to the public May 12, 1908. For well over one hundred years the Library has served the community as a reliable provider of information, resources, and space.

As such, renewal of the historic portions of the building should encourage people to linger and to utilize the space for a wide variety of uses, individually or in groups. Completed steps include repainting the outside of the Library building in colors that as closely match the colors of the original Carnegie Library and repairing the gutter system and other elements. A new sign has been crafted and installed, matching the historic sign for the city’s Museum of Natural History, on the opposite corner. City crews have just begun the effort of redoing and upgrading the landscaping on all four sides.

Collection Renewal:

The Collection Renewal element of the plan consists of several efforts. The first effort is both renewing the physical book collection itself (by implementing and maintaining good weeding and ordering practices) and re-situating the shelving to maximize accessibility, safety, browsing, and discoverability. The second effort is rethinking the physical locations and the functions that take place at the circulation and reference desks.

The third effort is adding electronic items to our “collection,” since that can vastly expand our virtual holdings, to make the Library an even greater resource for residents. As part of this effort, we recently launched Pacific Grove Public Library Online. Some of the services offered through this “virtual” branch include streaming video, free passes to bay area cultural and educational institutions, downloadable eBooks and online magazines.

Access Renewal:

By access, we are primarily referring to physical access into the library building. The library’s current entrance is somewhat hidden from the street by a covered portico that runs most of the length of the building. The portico can be dark, uncomfortable, and unwelcoming. From the street it is difficult to see the Library at all. There have been a variety of proposals that will be considered for how the building’s main access point could be altered. All of the proposals have the goal of making the Library visible and welcoming from Central Avenue as well as from the side streets on either side—Fountain and Grand—and from neighboring Jewell Park and the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History.

Next Steps

The plan is inspired by a desire to recapture the historical character of the original Carnegie library building, to best serve our users in the present, and to look toward remaining relevant and useful into the future.

To help generate ideas and capture knowledge from throughout our community, PGPL staff and volunteers have been conducting a series of historical tours of the Library, recounting its story and how it has developed over time. Each tour concludes with participants being asked to share their insights and ideas regarding the Library: what works, what does not work, what they would love to see happen or built or done.

These conversations thus far have resulted in a number of creative, interesting and innovative ideas, and solutions for areas in which the library needs to improve and evolve. The Library Advisory Board will be considering all of these ideas and suggestions at its upcoming monthly meetings (all of which are open to the public, and posted online and at Pacific Grove City Hall). The accompanying sidebar lists just some of the many suggestions we have been receiving with respect to all three elements of the draft plan.

We welcome your participation, your feedback, or just your continued enjoyment of our very special Library.

Sidebar 1:

Some of the feedback we have received so far:

- Replace the current overabundant, glaring and wasteful lighting with energy efficient, historically accurate, fixtures that can be turned off when there is sufficient natural light entering the library from the windows
- Remove the dropped ceiling which is sagging, damaged, unsightly and which blocks part of the original paneled ceiling which is still in place, but not visible
- Remove paint from arches, window frames and paneled ceiling to expose the original white pine natural wood finish
- Clean the two original skylights
- Replace concave skylight in half-rotunda with more historically-appropriate skylight to match the two original skylights and that also lets in more natural light
- Remove old, stained carpeting and if possible flooring to see if original Douglas fir wood flooring remains
- Replace metal periodical and newspaper shelving with wood shelving
- Move the existing public computers out of the historic space
- Create a visual representation of the library's original footprint (entrance, windows, courtyard, etc.) using paint, tile, and other style and design elements
- Re-open large archway on library's east side, reconnecting the two separated parts of the library's original footprint, but add lockable glass doors to separate after hours public space from library space but to keep the original space visible from the library
- Return historic east wing spaces, currently used for staff space, back into public space
- Cut down shelving to about 6' tall for safety and accessibility
- Turn shelving from east-west to north-south in order to shorten shelving lengths for safety and accessibility, to allow maximum natural light to filter through the library, and to open up the view from the front entrance through to the historic center of the library

- Continue with regular, rigorous weeding of the collection in order to ensure collection remains as current, relevant and accessible as possible based on community needs, demands and usage patterns
- Cut an arch into the wall dividing the 1978 from the 1950 and older sections of the library. An arched entrance at that point would echo the arches found throughout the historic parts of the library, thus softening the main stack room and easing the flow between the two different sections
- Situate circulation desk so that it faces the entrance and arriving patrons
- Reduce size of the reference desk. The desk should be smaller, taller, labeled Information and moved closer to the entrance and to the children's room in order to be more visible and welcoming
- Glass-in the portico and use the space for a used book store and/or a café with comfortable seating and tables that would also be available when the library is closed
- Cut off the roof of the portico or replace parts of it with skylights to let maximum light into the space and into the library and to clear the blocked view from the street
- Evaluate moving the entrance to the corner of Central Avenue and Grand Street, facing Jewell Park and the Museum of Natural History
- Glass in the entrance and extend to the Grand Avenue sidewalk in order to maximize visibility from Central Avenue
- Remove the portico entirely and replace it with a large, bright, glassed-in half-rotunda that parallels the half-rotunda at the back of the building
- Add arched windows to the western wall where none currently exist in order to increase natural light coming into the library
- Move children's collection either into the east wing (current staff space) or into the west wing (current fiction section) and turn the existing children's room into a public meeting space and reading/study space when not in use for meetings

Sidebar 2:

How to participate in the Library Renewal process:

- Attend City of Pacific Grove Library Advisory Board Meetings (Meetings are usually scheduled for the second Tuesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at the Pacific Grove Public Library).
- Join and support the Friends of the Pacific Grove Public Library. The Friends have already pledged \$50,000 to the project.
- Sign-up for a tour of the Library. The next Library Tour is scheduled for October 22, 2013 at 7:00 p.m. Call or visit the library to sign-up.