

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Airdrie is a friendly, vibrant and growing community that will develop a new library facility to support the increasing needs of residents. Over the past decade, the city has grown significantly in population and demand for library services has steadily increased. Between 2005¹ and 2012, Library cardholders increased 198%, circulation rose 320%, visitation grew 260% and program attendance soared 691%.

The increasing pressures on the Airdrie Public Library have been recognized in the community and a planning budget was added to the City of Airdrie three year capital plan in 2012. In preparation of this work, the Airdrie Public Library conducted a Facility Needs Assessment to identify appropriate spaces that will address community needs and expectations for resources, programs and services.

Engagement and Research

Within the Assessment, Airdronians were engaged to examine and understand community needs and expectations for the Library. Various methods were used to foster a 'community discussion' about how the Airdrie Public Library can best serve Airdrie in the immediate future, but also for many years to come. Approximately 1,775 individual citizens (from Airdrie and surrounding area) provided input and feedback through surveys, focus groups and open houses in the community engagement process. The work also took into account demographic characteristics and trends of the community, as well as best practices within the public library industry. The combination of input and findings helped to identify priorities and establish opportunities for the Airdrie Public Library Board to consider in a future facility.

Key results from the engagement and research processes include:

- ***Airdrie's Population is Growing and Younger*** – Airdrie has experienced significant population growth over the past decade. Indeed, since 2005 (less than 10 years) the population has almost doubled in size. Further, population growth is expected to continue over the next decade or so. Based on the demographic composition of the community, it is expected that much of the population growth has been families with young children, which is an important characteristic since this group is typically a primary user of public libraries. Actually, the demographic profile of Airdrie Public Library users confirms that young families are an important segment being served by the Library. It is expected that further population growth over the next decade or so will be young families.

¹ Note: The Airdrie Public Library began operations in its existing facility in January 2006.

- ***Use of Library is Increasing*** – Airdronians are increasingly using the Airdrie Public Library. Data from the Airdrie Public Library since 2005 reveals significant growth in use among Airdronians in all indicators (circulation, visitation, interlibrary loans, program attendance, etc.). Further, use has grown to the extent that almost half of Airdrie households used the Library in the past year and their use tends to be, on average, at least once a month. With projected population growth in Airdrie over the next ten to fifteen years, it is expected that use of the Airdrie Public Library will continue to increase substantially.

- ***Airdronians Appreciate and Value the Services Provided by the Library*** – Airdrie residents give high ratings of satisfaction to the Airdrie Public Library and consider the value received for tax dollars to be good to excellent. They also consider the Library to be important to their households, as well as the community at large. Further, even Airdronians who have not invested in a membership consider the Airdrie Public Library to be an important public asset within the community.

- ***Airdronians Recognize Various Service Priorities for the Library, which Translate into Different Space Needs*** – Through the research that was conducted, different service priorities were established by Airdrie residents for the Airdrie Public Library. In particular, Airdrie residents perceive the Library to be a place for entertainment and recreation, enabling early childhood development opportunities, and facilitating the pursuit of personal interests and self-development. They also give priority to the Library providing access to information, activities and events to help residents get involved in the community, supporting arts and cultural activities and events, assisting students to address educational and research needs, providing opportunities for children and youth to connect with each other and fostering access to and support for up-to-date technologies. These kinds of priorities can be accommodated through a diverse set of facility spaces, such as:
 - ***Spaces for collections and materials*** – Areas for printed books and magazines, CDs, DVDs, and audiobooks that address the needs of all users of the Library with possible specific areas for children and youth.

 - ***Spaces for reading, studying and relaxing*** – Areas for desks, kiosks, small quiet rooms, and comfortable spaces with sofas, comfy chairs, fireplaces, etc.

 - ***Spaces for programs, events and activities*** – Rooms or spaces that accommodate programs and creative opportunities for children, youth, and adults, but also support group assembly and community use.

 - ***Spaces for technology*** – Areas that will accommodate various types of computing technologies such as computer stations, library research tools, printing capabilities and pre-school computers; but also presentation technologies, video conferencing, virtual visualization environments, and advanced computing labs.

 - ***Spaces for social interaction and meeting*** – Areas or rooms where people can meet, gather, study, collaborate or simply relax.

- **Current Needs of the Community Require a Larger Library Facility** – When comparing the physical size of the Airdrie Public Library to other public libraries based on population size, the existing facility is less than a third of what might be expected. Basic extrapolation of averages would suggest a library facility in Airdrie should be approximately 3,015 m² (32,450 ft²), while it is currently 974 m² (10,484 ft²).

Through the community engagement process, the Airdrie Public Library was viewed as having a nurturing and substantive influence in the development of the community. Whether enabling children to pursue discovery and expand creativity, or linking youth with each other and ideas not yet considered, or energizing adults with entertaining stories and exploring new opportunities, Airdronians expect the Library to play an important role in fostering and supporting literacy, learning and connections within Airdrie. In the future, residents will look upon the Airdrie Public Library as *“an accessible centre of information that enhances quality of life”* by being progressive and responsive and providing leading edge programs, services and resources. Indeed, the vision of the Airdrie Public Library is to be a *“landmark community destination of choice”* for *“a community that is committed to literacy and lifelong learning.”*²

Space Concepts for a New Library Facility in Airdrie

Space concepts have been identified for the new library facility. Most areas of the new library facility will be used for collections, resources and services that are accessible and used by the general public. However, other areas will be used primarily by staff and service personnel. The following information highlights the primary space concepts proposed for the new library facility.

Public Areas

Customer Service Area – An active area with counter or desk where Library users can access assistance with circulation and membership issues.

Children’s Area – An area that accommodates collections and activities associated with children. It should be acoustically separated from other areas of the Library and provide an engaging playful environment, possibly themed.

Youth Area (Tween and Teen) – A youth oriented area that accommodates collections and small group programs, and enables social interaction and independent/group study. It should possibly be acoustically separated from other parts of the Library.

Children’s/Youth Program Rooms – Spaces that are used and oriented for children’s and youth programs, but are available for community use or adult library programs.

² Note: Excerpts from the Airdrie Public Library Mission and Vision.

General (Adult) Collections – Spaces that accommodate the balance of collections that is not included in children’s/youth areas.

Social/Relaxation Spaces – An area that would accommodate individuals and small groups to relax, read and socialize.

Study/Reading Spaces – Throughout the collections areas, quiet individual and group study spaces should be developed.

Information Service Pods – Information service pods (e.g. two) would be developed in the Library, which would be staffed so Library users can obtain assistance. Staffing of these pods also contribute to safety and security within the Library.

Technology Access Space (Adaptive stations) – An area that accommodates publically accessible electronic and technology services. There would be a shared public printer (fax, scan, copy) located within this area.

Collaborative Spaces – Separate rooms that are acoustically separated from the rest of the Library and allow for group study, interaction, project work, instruction (e.g. music lessons), etc. These spaces should have features that support group interaction and collaboration (e.g. white board, laptop plug-ins, internet access) and would be used for exam proctoring, tutoring, group work, etc.

Community Use Areas

- *Multipurpose Room* - A multi-faceted, multi-functional room that supports various types of programs and events, as well as community gatherings and meetings. This room should also be designed to accommodate the library’s collection.
- *Foyer* - The main entrance to the Library that accommodates library user movement. It should also be used for events, gathering and other mixed-use purposes.
- *Retail and Services Areas* - This area would accommodate commercial and retail space such as a coffee shop/kiosk, refreshment area, gift shop and sundries.

Library Work Areas

- *Interlibrary Loan Area* – Delivery and processing area for Regional Automation Consortium (TRAC) and other resource sharing partnerships and would be accommodated in this area. It must be located close to the Public Area, in particular Circulation.
- *Acquisitions Area* – An area that accommodates technical services staff; equipped with full workstations and radio frequency identification pads; could be in same large room with interlibrary loan area, but needs to be separated to provide less active area than is used for TRAC.

Staff and Volunteer Work Spaces

- *Processing and Volunteer Areas*
- *Kitchen*

Administrative Spaces and Offices

These will be typical office environments used by staff.

Critical Facility Components Area

Within the new library facility, there will be spaces and areas that will be necessary to support the general functional aspects of the library such as washrooms, custodial space, data room, electrical and mechanical room, parking, outside spaces, etc.

Special Consideration Areas

Special consideration should be given to various opportunities such as an interactive preschool literacy room and art displayed or exhibited throughout the library.

- *Interactive Preschool Literacy Room* - A place for caregivers and children to engage in literacy activities.
- *Art Displayed or Exhibited throughout Library* - Art should be included in all spaces throughout the library, including community rooms.

Subsequent architectural planning will further define the space concepts proposed above and specify more details of the functional programs for the facility.

It is expected that one main library branch in central (downtown) Airdrie would effectively and efficiently address the needs of the community. The library systems examined in other communities for the Facility Needs Assessment typically had one main branch (rather than a multi-branch system) until the population reached 80,000 to 100,000. Beyond this population level, branch libraries located in suburban areas are usually considered for development. Airdrie has not yet reached this population size and the data seem to confer that one main branch would adequately serve the community.

Proposed Development Options

In a workshop conducted with Airdrie Public Library Board Members, the findings of the research were examined and the following options were proposed. Essentially, it is expected that a main library of approximately 4,645 metres² (50,000 feet²) could serve community needs for many years to come (e.g. beyond 2028 when estimated population would be 71,084) with additional expansion of services within Airdrie occurring at branch library locations after the community reaches 80,000 to 100,000 population.

Taking into account current needs for a new library facility in Airdrie, as well as future needs, the following proposal was adopted for consideration.

If a new library facility is built to be completed in 2016:

Option 1:

- Plan for approximately 4,645 m² (50,000 ft²) and consider a branch library in 10-14 years (2026 to 2030). In the first five to ten years, the Airdrie Public Library would use about 3,715 m² (40,000 ft²), while the remaining 930 m² (10,000 ft²) could be used for other purposes (e.g. leased to another organization or used for other purposes). After five to ten years, the space should be made available to the Library for further expansion of service.

Option 2:

- Plan now for approximately 3,715 m² (40,000 ft²) and expect to expand the building in four to six years (2020 to 2022).

In either case, parking is expected to be a major issue for a new facility. The number of parking spots will be significant and location must take into consideration the necessity for parking.

The mission and vision of the Airdrie Public Library is that it will provide “*progressive, responsive, leading edge programs, services and resources*” and be “*a landmark community destination of choice*” that “*enhances quality of life*” and supports “*literacy, lifelong learning, leisure and cultural connections within the community.*” The new library facility and space concepts proposed through the Facility Needs Assessment should position the Airdrie Public Library to effectively pursue and address these strategic directions and contribute to the future vibrancy, culture and development of Airdrie.