

SPACE PLANNING: MAXIMIZING THE SPACE YOU HAVE

INTRODUCTION

This report was commissioned by the North Texas Regional Library System in order to provide its members with regional examples of libraries that have run out of space and are looking for opportunities to maximize the space currently being utilized. Two libraries were selected to participate in this report in order to provide examples of space planning issues, constraints and possible short term solutions.

The Dublin Public Library serves the City of Dublin, Texas located 70 miles southwest of Fort Worth. Dublin's population has remained steady since the 2000 census but library usage has increased. The collection has continued to grow and groups like young adults/teens are looking to the library to provide an environment for them to work on projects, find books and use computers. The library has land and future plans to expand but the solutions discussed in this report will assist them in the immediate future to provide a level of service the to meet the demands of today's library users.

Little Elm Public Library serves the Town of Little Elm, Texas located 15 miles northwest of Plano. Little Elm's population was recorded at nearly 3,600 residents in the 2000 census but has grown to over 21,700 residents today--and it continues to grow. The library has fully utilized all of its available space in its current location and its adjacency within the existing Town Hall allows them to share the Council conference room and the main lobby for programs and computer space. Yet these are temporary solutions that require scheduling coordination and cooperation between multiple departments. With the rapid growth of the city, all of the town departments and services find themselves in a similar situation of having outgrown existing space and requiring new infrastructure.

The following case studies look more closely at the challenges each library faces and potential resolutions that the libraries can consider and implement to respond to their short term needs.

Special thanks to the Dublin Public Library and Little Elm Public Library for participating in the case studies for this report. They are both experiencing space planning issues which are not unique challenges that MANY libraries today are facing and we appreciate their willingness to allow other libraries to learn from issues they are facing.

CASE STUDY #1



Dublin Public Library

FAST FACTS

LOCATION:	Dublin, TX
CURRENT POPULATION:	3,800
LIBRARY SIZE:	3,200 SF
YEAR BUILT:	1996

ISSUE #1 NOT ENOUGH STORAGE



fig 1

The Dublin Public Library was initially planned, like many, to maximize public space, but in doing so, neglected to provide adequate space for staff and storage of materials required for library programs, supplies and even janitorial supplies and equipment. Currently the Women's restroom has been closed to the public to accommodate this lack of storage and all patrons must use a key to access the only restroom facility available--the existing men's restroom which has been designated as a public and staff unisex restroom. This creates both a health and code compliance issue for the library. A library the size of Dublin is required to provide two water closets each for men women in order to meet current building code requirements. This issue must be addressed as soon as possible by sorting and purging many of the items currently being stored and rearranging existing spaces to create additional storage space, or pursuing the option of the purchasing a remote, water resistant and rodent resistant storage shed.



fig 2

The Library Directors storage closet (*fig 2*) could be rearranged to gain additional space. The bottom two shelves hold antique books that the library has removed from the collection but continue to take up valuable library space. This small collection should be sold or donated as soon as possible.

ISSUE #2 NO STAFF WORK AREA



fig 3

The library has created a niche behind 90" tall reference shelving to use as storage, a staff break room and staff work area (*fig 3*). The area serves as storage for historic newspapers. The library has a plan to scan the local papers to microfilm and then forward the papers to the historical society. This will create enough space to allow the library to add a wall and create a new directors office. Then the existing library director's office, located directly adjacent to the circulation desk, could be converted into a new staff work room. (*See New Furniture Layout*).

ISSUE #3 CIRCULATION DESK



fig 4



fig 5

The circulation desk in this library was custom built during construction. At the time, it was planned for a single staff member to work at this station and provide public service. Currently, it is the only work area available and being utilized by two staff members. In addition to a shortage of space, the knee spaces provided do not meet current ADA accessibility standards nor generally accepted ergonomic guidelines for a staff work space. The lack of wire management poses a tripping hazard for patrons as well as the unexpected power and data disconnect to staff while they are working (fig 5). In the interim, the library needs to add wire management by purchasing wire ties and securing the surge protector to beneath the work surface. The library should also contact a local mill work contractor to add shelving above the credenza behind the desk. This will add much needed storage at the desk area. For the long term, the library should consider replacing the service desk with a modular system that will allow flexibility and the ability to reconfigure the desk in a manner that allows library staff to greet library users as they enter the library.

ISSUE # 4 OUT OF LIBRARY SPACE



fig 6



fig 7

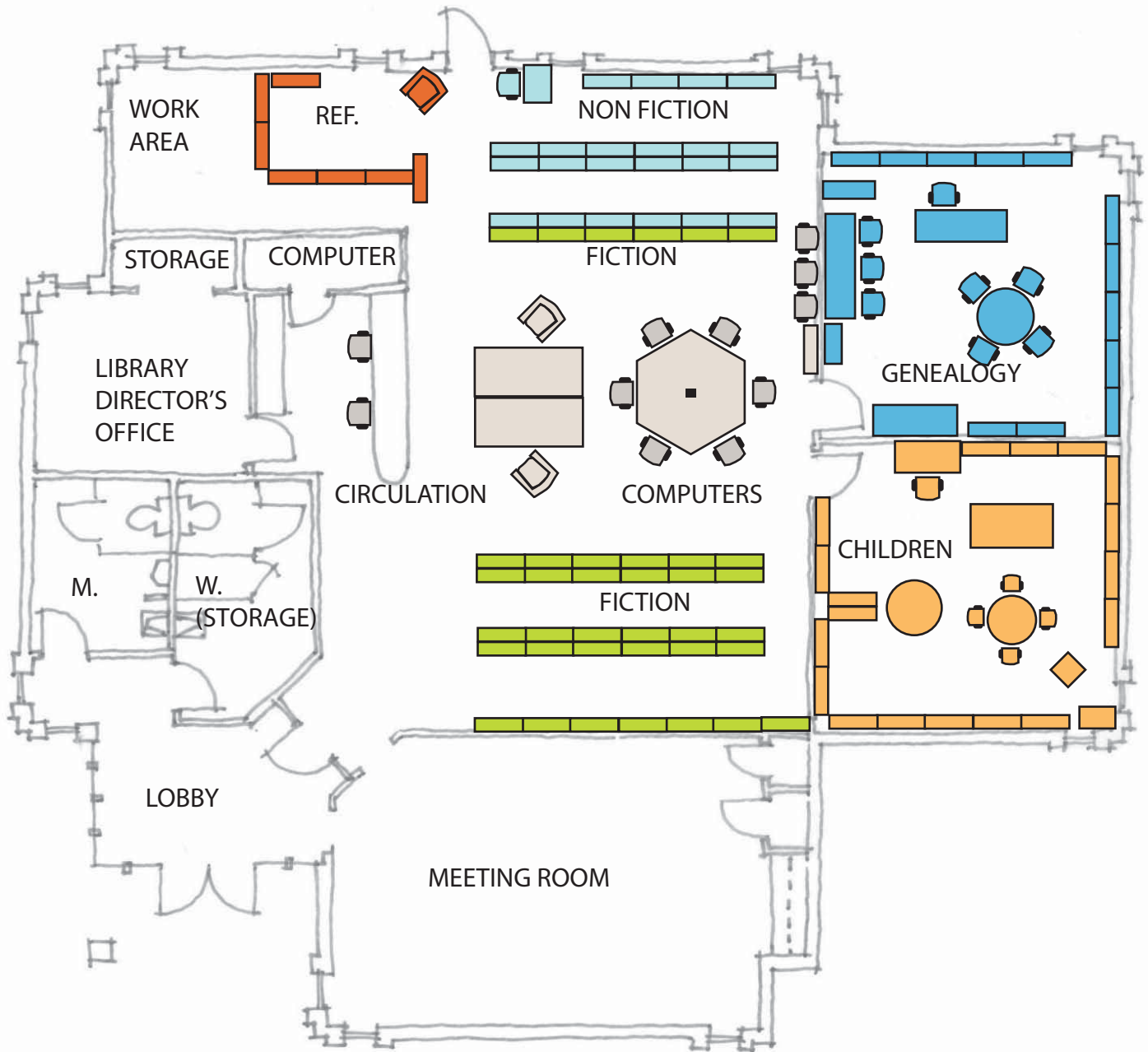
The library has a large genealogy collection that is housed in a room that is approximately 400 square feet (fig 6). The collection provides important cultural information to the citizens of Dublin but the room is more often used for quiet reading and research than genealogical research. Currently, the library has a large meeting room with two large expanses of blank wall (fig 7). One potential solution would be the addition of shelving units with lockable glass fronts allowing the genealogy collection to be on display in the meeting room. This measure will create enough space to place the reference collection and non fiction collection in the current genealogy room. It will also give the genealogy collection more visibility.

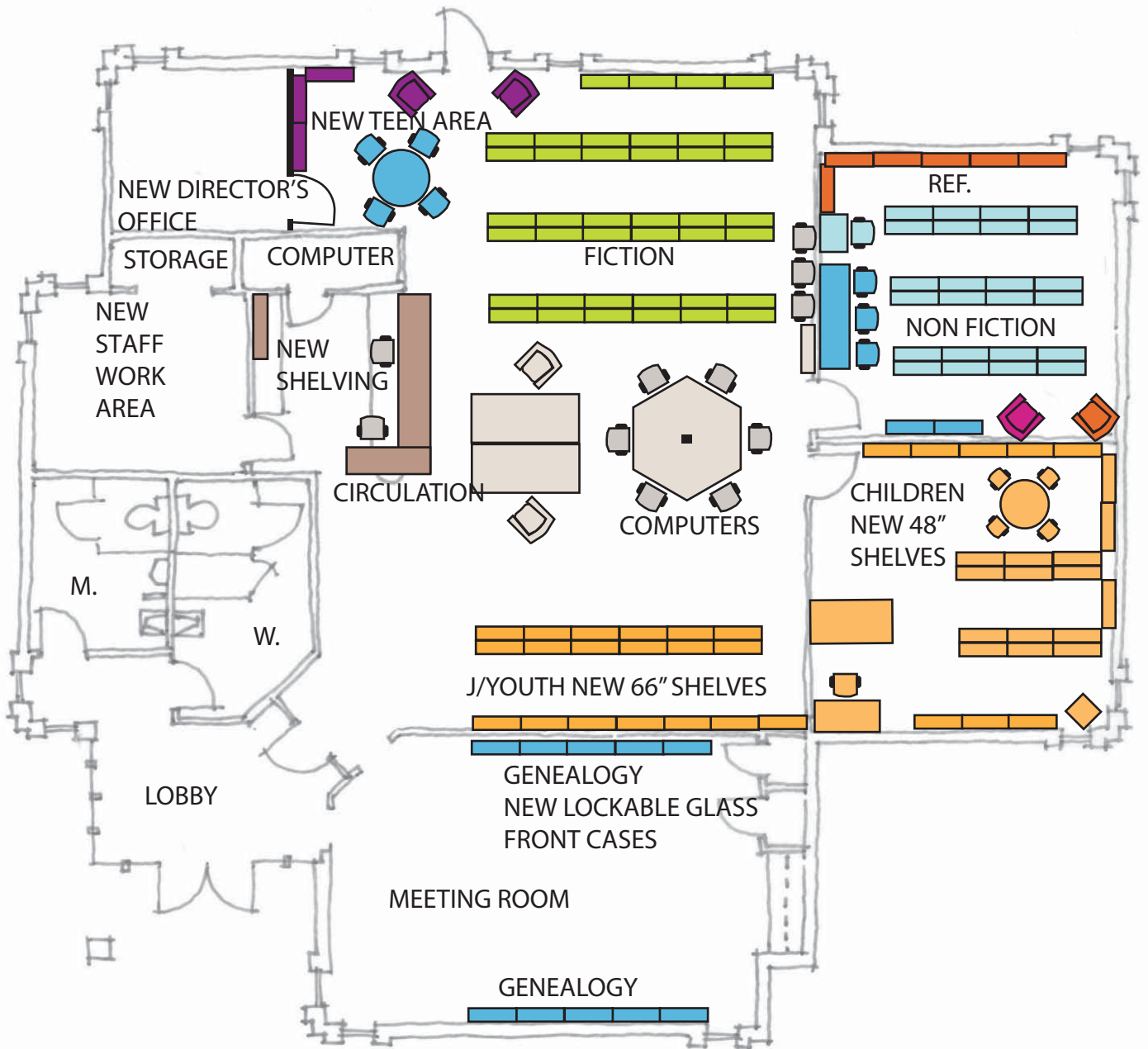
An added benefit of relocating the reference and non fiction collections to the genealogy space will be the ability to add a much needed young adult/teen area and expand the fiction area. The space directly in front of the newly formed library directors office will create a perfect, visible niche for their collection.



fig 8

The children's area is currently zoned in its own room (fig 8). This works well for the library and provides a good setting for story time programs. However, it has limited their ability to expand this growing collection. This has resulted in the majority of the children's collection being housed on tall shelving that is not accessible to the children. With the shift of the adult collection, the juvenile collection could be moved and the picture books housed on new 48" high shelves.





CASE STUDY #2



Little Elm Public Library

FAST FACTS

LOCATION:	Little Elm, TX
CURRENT POPULATION:	21,700
LIBRARY SIZE:	4,200 SF
YEAR BUILT:	2003 (Moved into City Hall)

ISSUE #1 OUT OF PUBLIC SPACE



The Little Elm Library was planned when the population of the town was 3,600 and growing at a steady but reasonable pace. Since 2003 the population has more than doubled and use of the library has increased at a rate exceeding over 200 new library card holders a month. Library staff has done an excellent job of keeping the stacks full of materials relevant to the citizens while continually making room for new materials. In addition, the library offers an average of 12 programs to library users of all ages each week without a true dedicated program room. They have been forward looking in their furniture purchases with mobile shelving that provides flexibility and allows them to more readily react to changes in library focus, highlight a special collection while maximizing the current limited space.



There are a few areas in the public spaces that would benefit from the removal of clutter or slight adjustments in furniture arrangement. For example, the library storage area (which also serves as the program and meeting room) had several sections of sloped a/v shelving. The library staff was able to add the unused surplus shelving to the adult a/v stacks--this small change resulted in additional space in the meeting / program / storage area (fig 1) as well as additional room for a/v materials.



The library currently keeps three typewriters for patron use and a scanner. The typewriters could be eliminated with the purchase of PDF because of its new typewriter tool (although it will not address carbon copies). This small software investment will allow the library to remove some existing equipment that is being currently stored in the public area on shelving canopy tops.

ISSUE #2 OUT OF STAFF SPACE



While the Little Elm Library has excelled in providing service to its patrons it must now turn its focus on providing an adequate space for its staff to perform their work. Without the space for staff there is the potential that the excellent customer service they have provided to date may suffer. It is a delicate balance in public library planning and management to ensure there is sufficient space for all of the public AND staff functions. At the Little Elm Public Library, 7 departments including library administration work together in 270 SF (*fig 4*), which also serves as the staff break area (*fig 5*).



The public area has been the main focus of the library to date but the staff area is now in desperate need of attention. There is a potential option available to relieve the overcrowding of the staff work area. The room that is currently being used as the library meeting/program and staff storage (*fig 6*) appears large enough to accommodate two work stations for library staff. This measure would allow the existing industrial shelving used for the storage of library program materials to remain and be more secure. This additional space would allow library staff the space they need to do their job safely and efficiently -- potentially offering the opportunity to provide even better public service. This change however, is not without its own challenges. The elimination of the only dedicated program space will mean that all library programs will take place in other areas of the existing Town Hall. Library staff must supervise the remote programs and will then not be available to assist at the circulation desk. The library utilizes its programs as marketing for all the services it offers to the community. Hence, the change in program venue will also diminish the public relations potential.



Finally, shifting the staff departments to the existing program room would allow the library director to utilize the existing staff workroom for her office and work area. This would give her the space she needs to perform her duties as director as well as storage and layout space for both the library and city projects she chairs. The limited options and alternatives do not necessarily provide a perfect solution, as the existing workroom is the main traffic path for library staff, does not have doors or privacy and is located directly behind the circulation desk.

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LESSONS LEARNED

Library services have changed tremendously over the last decade and many libraries are struggling to accommodate traditional library services as well as providing access to computers, programs and cultural events serving as both the community and cultural center in the same amount of available space. The two case study libraries offer lessons learned that can be applied to many libraries. They include:

Stop taking free stuff. This can be a difficult philosophical shift when one is working on a tight budget, but if you do not have the space please say “I’m sorry, we could really use this but there is just no available space”. In addition, “free stuff” takes up valuable space (the average new library in Texas costs \$200/square foot construction cost). Keep that in mind when you agree to accept the next box from a well meaning patron.

Remove the clutter. Clutter (signs, decorations, old electronic equipment and donated items that may be useful in the future) makes a space appear disorganized and much smaller. Try removing everything off a desk or work surface and observe the difference both physically and mentally.

Make sure you are using space in a way that supports your mission. If the library has a mission to provide the best service to the senior citizens of the community, make sure space is allocated accordingly.

Get control of your wires. This is easier than it seems--just visit a hardware store and get your power and data wires zip tied or wrapped in wire management conduit and mounted to the underside of the work surface. It will look better, avoid tripping hazards and make the space feel larger.

Purchase the most flexible furniture possible. Growth equates to less space per capita and the reconfiguration of space/functions. Adaptability becomes a priority. This can be accomplished with moveables shelving, modular work stations and especially service desks.

Provide space for public functions AND space for the staff space to support them. Staff must have adequate space to work in order to provide the best possible service to the public--the two go hand and hand.



Maureen Arndt has devoted her entire career to the design of libraries that are both beautiful and functional. Having worked on over 50 libraries across the country she brings that wealth of knowledge and expertise to each new project. She is a frequent speaker at library events sharing “Lessons Learned” and “Trends in Library Design” from an architect and interior designer’s perspective.