

BOULDER PUBLIC LIBRARY
FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY – LIBRARY COMMISSION
Meeting Held April 27, 2006
Minutes Completed April 28, 2006

A focus group discussion was held on Thursday, April 27 with Library Commissioners Steve Clason, Stephen Topping, Mike Keenan and Nadia Haddad. The fifth Commissioner, Lydia Tate, was interviewed individually on Friday, April 28. This summary documents major points made while the group answered each of the following questions. Items in italics indicate strong agreement among participants.

1. What factors (either internal or external) help the Boulder Public Library to be successful? What are the organization's most significant strengths?

- *Professional staff have a strong commitment to public service, are patron-focused and knowledgeable.*
- *Boulder is a literate community that supports the BPL.*
- *The Main Library is a beautiful building in a beautiful, central location.*
- *BPL's eclectic approach to its mission. This has allowed it to become a community center and to offer arts and cultural programs.*
- *BPL provides wonderful arts and culture programs and the facility is well-suited to these uses.*
- The Branch system has been a success. Branches cater to the neighborhood needs and are convenient for near-by residents.
- The history of the Library.
- Some participants felt that technology and the Library's website are strengths for BPL, even though resources are not always available to do what is desired in the field of technology.
- The electronic databases.
- BPL offers a wide range of resources to the community, from periodicals and non-fiction books to public meeting rooms.
- Outreach to segments of the community.

2. In what ways does the BPL need to improve? What are the Library's most significant weaknesses or obstacles?

- *Budget constraints are a major obstacle/challenge.*
 - *Budget is dependent on City Council.*
 - *Administrative staff seems to be running a little scared, given recent budget cuts.*
 - *Staff seems afraid to raise money privately.*
 - *There is no clear sense of the future.*
- *Senior staff members are stretched very thin, given the recent staff reductions and budget cuts. There is not enough time to devote to some important activities.*

- *Examples mentioned were: staff professional development, learning about cutting-edge technologies, planning for the future rather than reacting to what comes, developing library blogs, training volunteers, client interaction and outreach to underserved populations.*

Idea: Consider closing the Library periodically for professional development, the way schools do.

- Access to the BPL is limited. (This is a result of budget constraints.)
 - *Hours have been reduced.*
 - There are no branches in north Boulder and east Boulder.
- Historically, BPL was at the cutting-edge of information delivery, but it is falling behind in how information is delivered. (Examples: Libraries commonly have blogs available to discuss new books, but BPL does not; the BPL website is difficult to use; the databases are difficult to use.)
- Access to new books and the book “hold” system do not work well. It takes too long to make popular, high-use books and DVDs available.
- There does not seem to be a coherent strategy for DVDs.
- Senior staff members are all around 55 years old, meaning they could all retire at about the same time.
- The Main Library building works better as an arts venue than it does as a library.
 - Building is difficult to reconfigure.
 - Lines of sight in the building are bad, requiring more staffing to cover all areas well.
- There are security issues (transients).
- There is low usage of the BPL by minority populations.
- Library budgets/resources are being cut in the schools, putting more pressure on the BPL to meet these needs.
- Boulder’s role in Boulder County is changing. It is no longer “the center” of everything.
- The community doesn’t know about or know how to use some of the good resources that the Library has (e.g., databases, Prospector) and some of these resources are not easy to use.

3. What external trends or issues do you think will have the greatest impact on the Library over the next 5 – 10 years?

- *Rapid changes in technology.*
 - It’s now possible to download books.
 - More and more information is available online.
 - Library could find that it is irrelevant in 10 years if it doesn’t do things to remain relevant.
 - Library needs to figure out how to keep up with technology or determine that it doesn’t need to.

- It is very difficult to predict technology trends. (For example, electronic books didn't take off when anticipated, but Ipods suddenly are an important medium for getting information.)
- School library resources are being cut.
 - This could provide additional opportunities for partnerships and collaboration.
 - The two different bureaucracies could make this a challenge.
- Boulder's population is becoming older and richer.
- Today's youth is used to instant gratification. This impacts their expectations about access to information.
- People are more demanding in wanting information quickly and that it be specific in meeting their needs. (These needs are harder to meet with books.)
- How BPL is funded is an issue. BPL provides services to people who do not live in Boulder and therefore do not pay taxes to support the Library.
- Over the last five years there have been more controversies involving the Library (i.e., flying of the large American flag, some art displays, implications of PATRIOT Act) than had been the case historically. Given the Main Library's location in the community hub, today's politics and the nature of Boulder's population, it is probable that there will be more controversial issues to deal with in the future.
- The population growth in Boulder County is on the fringes.
- Discount retailers have been dropping the price of books, making it more affordable for people to buy books.
- The City Manager wants Boulder to become an arts destination. This could create opportunities for the Library.
- What is BPL's long-term strategy for book storage?

4. Are there significant unmet needs in the community that BPL should try to address over the next 10 years?

- We need a survey of non-users to help answer this question.
- The Library needs to expand – there is a need for a North Boulder branch, expansion of Main (for a large Teen Space and small group gathering spaces).
- If branches are a need, then we need more.
- Many people are getting their information without going to the Library. Could the Library meet their needs better than what they are currently using?
- Space is needed for the historical archives.

Ideas:

- Replace computer terminals with laptops that could be checked out to patrons for use at the Library. This would allow more flexibility in how space is used.

- Maybe what is needed are more community centers, with libraries in them.

5. How do you think BPL is viewed in the community? What is its reputation or image? (If negative, what can be done to improve its image and reputation?)

- *Library is well regarded in the community. There is a lot of community support.*
 - When Library had to reduce hours, community came up with money to keep it open.
- Library could use more public relations and exposure in the community.
 - *The "One Book" program has been great.*
 - The Library could have events that coincide with the festivals that are held downtown.

Other Comments/Ideas:

- For the BPL to continue to exist, it needs to be a good place to congregate, with excellent access to information. (Books will become less important over time.)
- BPL will become more of a community gathering place.
- Can we afford the branches? We need to live within the financial realities and maybe the branches will have to close and that money put into Main. The lease is coming due at Meadows Branch.
- There is a new City Council every two years.
- Should Carnegie be part of the Library?
- It may be important to partner with other libraries, with each specializing in a particular area to make resources go further.
- The longevity of staff is both a strength and a weakness. The experience and knowledge base is wonderful and it can be harder for people who have been doing the job for 20+ years to embrace change and learn new technologies rapidly.
- BPL has to be flexible.