

January 2009

The Role of the Library Board of Trustees in the Construction of a Public Library

Kathryn S. Ames

Athens Regional Library System, kames@arlsmail.org

Greg Heid

Newton County Library System

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq>

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ames, Kathryn S. and Heid, Greg (2009) "The Role of the Library Board of Trustees in the Construction of a Public Library," *Georgia Library Quarterly*: Vol. 46 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq/vol46/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Georgia Library Quarterly by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

Spotlight On CONSTRUCTION

The Role of the Library Board of Trustees in the Construction of a Public Library

by Kathryn S. Ames and Greg Heid

As consultants, the exact role that the library board plays in the process to design and construct a library facility is one of the most often-asked questions that we receive from library directors. Some directors believe that each and every question, consideration and decision should be vetted by the library board before any action is taken or order given on a project. Other directors firmly believe that the library board should be held to selection of the interior colors of the building and the fabric on the furniture and should sign all checks and documents placed before them — without question. In every library construction project, the answer lies somewhere between these two extremes. This article is designed to help prompt library directors, administrators and board members to look at the areas where the library board may well have a direct role in the design and construction of a library facility.

First and foremost, the library board of trustees is an essential team member in the construction process, providing a vital link to a construction project's success. The library board is the owner of the construction program, and the members are the representatives of the community in the construction project. Board members are as necessary to the design and construction of a library as are the library director, administration staff, the architect, interior design professional, general contractor and project manager of the construction project. The work of the library board begins long before the first pencil line is set to the design or the first nail is hammered into wood.

Before seeking funding for any project, the board should conduct a Facilities Master Plan study for the library

system. Using census projections and planning data from various sources, including the state's Office of Planning and Budget and the local county planning department, the director and board should examine the demographic information about future county growth patterns, analyze trends and determine how library services will be delivered in the future. Existing buildings within the system will be evaluated, and a needs assessment will be used by funding agencies to evaluate the gap and need. The library board will also be responsible for site selection and purchase.

The next step in the process is developing a strategic plan. The necessity of this is obvious — to plan a facility that will serve the future, the board needs to know where it is planning to position itself in the future! We recommend using the Public Library Association's *Planning for Results* as a template for this process. Among the key characteristics of the plan are identifying community needs and analyzing how the library system might respond to those needs. This will enable the library board and professional staff to address societal needs as well as effectively relate to community issues — an important part of the justification for construction. Well developed library planning documents will make a construction project run much smoother.

Another part of the planning process may include community meetings, interviews, surveys, targeted focus groups or a charrette to gather community input. If the library board is considering a LEED building, the charrette is a session where building stakeholders discuss design issues



Ames



Heid

related to sustainable design. All of these processes build enthusiasm for the building project.

The members of the library board have a number of responsibilities that they must approve during the entire construction project. Areas for board approval include:

- Determine funding requirements for project, select site, complete all state-required documents
- Select the consultants, architect and design team based on RFP and interviews
- Approve all phases of the design of the building
- Approve interior furnishing and equipment for the library
- Approve the contract documents and bid process
- Authorize payment for invoices received on the project
- Approve all change orders
- Help resolve areas of conflict during construction
- Sign off on the final inspection and punch list for substantial completion

The most important responsibility that the library board has in a building project is that they possess the final responsibility for full financial oversight of the entire project. And in having that responsibility, the library board must be appraised of and must ultimately approve all contracts and expenditures of the construction project.

The library board of trustee members all have a duty to be fully informed of all laws, codes and regulations that govern a library construction project. The board needs to follow all laws and regulations — especially relating to contracts and bidding. The library director is responsible to ensure that the board is informed of all laws, codes and regulations. But it is the library board members who are legally responsible for all to be followed.

Following the completion of the needs assessment and planning document, the board may appoint a building committee to work with the library director and designated professional staff. Not all members of the library board have the time or the degree of need to be involved in a construction project. For some library boards of trustees, the building committee consists of the executive committee of the library board. The overall purpose of a building committee is to have a smaller subset of the entire library board whose members can meet more often and work closely with the architect, the general contractor or the library director, with little lead time, in order to make decisions or select options in a timely manner. Members of a building committee are library board

members who agree to study and follow the building design and construction in detail in order to make many primary decisions for the library board or make final recommendations for the library board, as a whole, to review and select.

Once a building committee has been formed, decisions need to be made on the roles, expectations, delegation and responsibilities each board, committee and staff member will have within the construction project. Daily administration of the construction project should be under the aegis of the library director, who communicates frequently with the architectural design team. The library board needs to set approval levels for the library director as well as the building committee of the library board.

The library board will need to determine:

- What types of decisions can be made by the library director and building committee
- Expectations that will guide the building committee's functions
- How the building committee will report back to the library board
- The actions that will require a full vote by the library board
- Who can sign change orders and contracts
- What types of subcommittees should be appointed for various aspects of the construction program

Most library boards of trustees delegate levels of approval based on monetary levels of contracts, change order amounts, etc. The following gives an example of fiscal level of approval and authorities that a library board may set:

Fiscal Approval and Signature Levels of Construction Contracts, Change Orders and Purchase Orders:

- \$0.00 to \$15,000 — Library director with notification to board chair. Full library board formally approves at next meeting.
- \$15,001 to \$25,000 — Building committee approval. Full library board formally approves at next meeting.
- \$25,001+ — Full library board approval at called or regular meeting.

Establishing levels of approval sets clear expectations of levels of authority. It also creates transparency within the decision-level process of the construction project. Library directors who have constructed many library facilities over time may have a much higher fiscal level of approval on all

but the architectural and general contractor contracts because of their demonstrated experience in past construction projects for the system. Other library boards of trustees may give the library director full approval of all contracts and change orders because a county construction manager or budget office is also approving or auditing the entire process. As consultants, we always suggest the library board of trustees set fiscal approval levels for the library director and building committee with follow-up ratification of all decisions by the board.

There are different steps, or stages, that the architect will complete for the overall design of the library facility. The library board and the building committee, along with the library director, should be actively participating in each of the design steps in order to ensure that a consensus is established and followed from the beginning. This will prevent expensive design changes or costly redesigns from becoming necessary later on in the process.

The Building Program, which will be approved by the library board, will draw upon documents developed during earlier phases and then outline the various service areas of the library. The board will issue the Request for Proposal for Architectural Services and will be responsible for contract documents and negotiation. Once the architect is

hired, the library board, building committee and director work together to determine design. However, it is essential that the library director be the person designated to make decisions on the way the building will function.

During the schematic design process, the entire library board should meet with the library director and architect several times. During these meetings, the architect will be able to question library board members for their ideas on the overall design of the library. It is at these same meetings that the architect will present the design options that he or she is considering and explain each proposed design. Library board members, in turn, should look at all the initial proposed drawings for the building and voice concerns and dislikes as well as what each member likes about any particular proposed design. It is at these meetings where a consensus of the library board's vision of the design will be developed. The architect then can take the consensus back to the drawing table to complete the schematic design of the facility for the project. The building committee and library director will also take this consensus as the vision that everyone will work with in subsequent meetings throughout the remaining design and construction phases.

The schematic design stage is also where the formal cost



FriendsBookSale.com

Maximize the value of your library discards and donations by selling them on the Internet.

Minimize the effort and expense by having Friends Book Sale, LLC do all the work.

INTERNET BOOK SALES FOR LIBRARIES

We provide on-site screening of your media and free transportation to our facility.

GLA and FOGL members receive a no-obligation \$20 sign-up bonus and a permanent 5% earnings bonus!

Visit our Web site for full details and to sign up — or contact Page Kaufman at 678-799-8278 or Page@FriendsBookSale.com.



estimates for the entire construction project will be fully developed. The library director and possibly a financial consultant should review the proposed cost estimates and pass them to the library board. The library board needs to study and then approve the proposed budget as presented by the architect. It is at this point where the library board will see if the library facility can be realistically constructed (in current dollars) with the funds set aside for the project. If the funding does not meet the projected cost to design and construct the facility, then the library board should determine if additional funding needs to be raised or if the architect must design the facility into a more cost-efficient (and possibly smaller) footprint. It is critical for the library board to meet with the library director and architect to come to a resolution and plan for how to accommodate any potential fiscal shortfalls in the budget for the project.

Once the architect has completed the schematic plans of the library facility, the architect will formally present the building plans and project budget to the full library board for approval. The library board's approval of the schematic plans will allow the architect to continue to the next phase of the design process. Formal approval of the schematic plans will also signify that the architect can invoice the library system for completion of this first stage of design and allow the director to approve payment of this invoice.

During the next phase, design development, the architect refines the overall design of the facility, showing furniture placement within the future building, completed elevations of the building, ceiling grid layout, building sections, construction detail, site plans, more refined cost details and landscape plans for the site where the library will be constructed. Structural and mechanical details of the facility will also be developed. At this phase of the design process, the building committee will be meeting quite regularly with the library director and architect to review progressive design plans and discuss many details of the building layout, design and furnishing layout within the future building. The building committee and the director should also continually review the architect's designs in light of the original goals of the facility that were established during the Building Program phase of the project.

It becomes quite easy, at this juncture, to become so involved in the details of the process that the primary goals and service priorities of the building become lost in the detail. It is the responsibility of the building committee to take a step back to review the architect's design plans during the design development stage in context of the Building Program and the larger goals of the project.

During the design development phase of the architectural design process, the interior furniture and equipment will be addressed. Whether the architect has an in-house interior design consultant or the interior contract is handled by a subcontracted firm, the building committee and director (and possibly library staff members) will be meeting with the interior design consultant to review many photos and samples of furniture, fabric, finishes, color swatches, etc. Often the consultant will arrange to have multiple samples of tables, chairs and other furniture pieces delivered to the library system so the building committee, director and staff can review and "try out" the items for comfort and usability. We recommend that it is always a good idea for the building committee to set aside time for the other members of the library board to participate in the process to "vote" for their favorite or most comfortable style and design.

After reviewing the various styles, designs and samples of furniture, colors and finishes that the interior design consultant has recommended, the building committee must select, from the hundreds of photos and samples, the final furniture design, types and interior finishes to be presented to the full library board for approval. The consultant will take the selected options and create a design board that he or she will present to the library board for final approval.

Often two or three different "design pallets" are presented to allow members of the library board to compare before the final selection is made.

The architect will again formally meet with the full library board to present the design development and interiors plans to the board for approval. Formal approval of the design development plans will both instruct the architect to proceed to the next stage to develop the working plans and will allow the library director to pay the architect's invoice for this stage of the design process. It is most important for the library board members to realize that the formal approval of the design development and interior design plans and specifications should not be given unless all board members and the library director are completely satisfied with the designs, plans, etc. Once the architect begins developing the working drawings and construction documents, it becomes an expensive proposition of additional costs to have changes made to any of the designs or documents.

Working plans or construction documents are the final documents that the architect develops for the construction of the library facility. These documents will be used to bid the project for a general contractor and will be used by the general and subcontractors to actually construct the

Spotlight On **CONSTRUCTION**



library building. The documents will also be used by the architect, library director and staff to obtain any local permits and approvals for the project. At this phase of the design process, the architect has gained all of the needed input from the library board in order to complete both the design and the documents to bid for the general contractor of the project.

Once the architect has completed the construction documents, there are several steps that the library board should take before the bid is advertised for the general contractor. The library board should review the final plans of the building. Although the architect, the library board and library director have thoroughly discussed (and may have changed) the plans several times in the schematic and design development stages, the board is best served by making one last review of the plans before signing off on the documents. For the remaining bid documents, the library board should approve the library director to have legal counsel review all of the contract documents — especially general conditions of the contractor agreement.

Before the general contractor bid is advertised, the library board will also be involved in two additional requirements of the project. The library board, as the client, will be required to have insurance coverage on the project. The library director will most likely work with the advice from the architect and the library's insurance agent to extend the library system's existing coverage to include the new construction project. The library board is responsible to review and approve the extension of insurance and the amount of coverage necessary for the construction project. Additionally, the director and staff need to begin to obtain the local permits and approvals that are required for construction if the architect is not contracted to perform this task. In order to expedite the process, the library board should give approval for the architect, library board chair and the library director to obtain, sign and secure all necessary local permits associated with the construction of the library facility.

A question that is often asked before the general contractor comes onto the construction project is who to invite to the groundbreaking ceremony for the library. Whereas the library board is the owner of the building, it is best to remember that the library board is also the host of the groundbreaking ceremony. And as a good host, library board members should ensure that other appropriate individuals and stakeholders feel that they are fully a part of the ceremony. Elected officials of the municipality that is funding the construction of the library must be invited and given a shovel to be part of the event. Any state or federal elected officials who are responsible for the funding of the construction and general operation of the library should also be at the event with a shovel in hand as well. The library board chair and the chair of the building committee should be given shovels to participate in the ceremony. Then the remainder of the library board and director can be a part of the ceremony (and included in the official photo).



While the Cobb County Public Library System's Mountain View Regional Library is under construction, library services have been relocated to a quick-service trailer. (Photo by Erika Ruthman)

The key to success is clear communications. Jeannette Woodward in *Countdown to a New Library* discusses "Who decides what?" She stresses that the director, board and building committee must establish procedures for communicating information, obtaining input and making decisions early in the building process. Every meeting among project principals must be documented and reported to all interested parties including library staff, board members and other stakeholders such as the Friends of the Library, the

library foundation and all funding agencies. Decisions should be recorded and shared. Meeting notes should be distributed within 24 hours so that there is no misunderstanding and the decision-making process is clear. Be sure to keep a paper copy of all correspondence and e-mail on the project.

Members of the library board have two very important roles that are often forgotten or assumed to be otherwise handled during the design and construction of the library building. The library board of trustees represents the

community in which the library is to be constructed. Because of this, members of the board are akin to ambassadors to the community for the library system. Although press releases will be sent out to the media and library Web sites will track the stages of design and construction, library board members should expect to be out in the community to inform the citizens of the progress of the construction project. This may be as simple as bringing up the construction progress as a topic of conversation in a social gathering or it may take the form of accompanying the library director to speak about the construction of the library to various civic groups within the community.

The other important role that the library board plays throughout the design and construction process is to keep their appointing authority up-to-date during each stage of the project. Library board members need to keep their appointing authority informed as to what can be expected as the construction project progresses. Quite often, members of the library board assume that the library director is responsible for providing progressive updates of the construction project to local governmental officials. It is best practice and good politics for each library board member to keep in continual communication with the elected official who appointed them as to the progress of the construction. After all, the elected officials are the ones who approved the local funding to construct the library. Not only do they want information on each stage of the construction project, but they often need to report to their constituents the progress as to how tax dollars are being spent. Library board members should also not forget to inform their appointing authority of any delays or issues impacting the construction of the library — before the local official reads about it in the newspaper.

Through the actual construction process of the library building, the role of the library board often becomes one of monitoring the process of construction and occasional review of any change in the design plan. All of the approvals for design of the building and the selection of the general contractor have been made. The building committee and the full library board will monitor the progress of the construction through reports from the library director, progress reports from the architect and general contractor, and occasional tours of the construction site. Any problems or major issues that develop during the construction of the building may require building committee or full library board action. Change orders that occur during this phase of the construction program will be handled by the appropriate person or group as set at the beginning of the design phase and ultimately approved by the library board. Members of the library board and building committee members should remember to always make timely decisions regarding any

change order as any delay in addressing a change order will affect the project schedule and may create additional costs if a decision is unnecessarily delayed.

Another question we answer quite often for library boards is the names that should be listed on the official plaque on the building. Library board members and elected officials often change during the span of a library construction program. Sometimes the key people who spent the most time nurturing the idea of a new library building and then lobbying to fund the construction of the library facility are no longer in office or sitting as library board members when the library building becomes a reality. The best solution to this dilemma is to list together both the current and past library board members (with terms of office). This will distinguish between those who first were a part of the project and those who are currently sitting on the library board. For elected officials, the best practice is to list the current elected officials by the commission or council upon which they sit. Then follow with a list of "Past Officials" with the names, offices and the term of office of any previously elected official during the construction process. At the bottom of the plaque, list the library director, architectural firm, construction firm and any primary consultants (with titles) that were used in the project.

Toward the end of the construction process, the building committee and the library board should inspect and must vote to accept the library building. At the last stages of construction, the building committee should accompany the library director and general contractor to inspect the library facility as the final punch list is developed. The building committee's in-depth involvement in the planning of the project will become invaluable as they assist the library director to inspect the facility. Once the punch list has been completed and the fire marshal has permitted the building for occupancy, the library board should formally accept the building. Formal acceptance will allow the library director to pay the final invoice of the general contractor and to transfer all utilities from the contractor to the library system.

This has been a fast survey where we have highlighted the responsibilities of library board members and building committee members throughout the process of constructing a library building. We hope that this article has given insight and direction into the necessary responsibilities and communication that members of a library board must assume during the design and construction of a public library facility. ►►

Kathryn S. Ames is director of the Athens Regional Library System. Greg Heid is director of the Newton County Library System. Tom Ploeg, retired director of construction for Georgia Public Library Service, also contributed information for this article.