The Library Building Project: Surviving and Triumphing

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Me: always stumbling into another building project.
Next to Last Straw
The Last Straw

The tale of the terribly high-tech library building

BY JEANNETTE WOODWARD

A little information management savvy can go a long way in keeping your new facility from becoming a state-of-the-art nightmare.

Unfortunately, the library director did not share the general warm glow. Possibly his disenchantment began after discovering that the state-of-the-art air conditioner, which could easily have chilled a small city, inflated the electric bill so much that the system had to be shut down. The sun’s rays, shining through vast expanses of glass, heated the building to egg-frying temperatures—a condition that may have accounted for the librarian’s less-than-sunny outlook.

The state-of-the-art heating module might have worked as predicted if cost overruns had not resulted in a decision to reduce the number of temperature zones. Consequently, the same quantity of heated air swirled forth in the already toasty window area as in the frigid basement.

Luckily, the library director was a born engineer. After several years, until an electrical consultant arrived on the scene and warned that the building was in grave danger, he started adding an electric circuit for each zone. The system barely survived until the consultant arrived.
What went wrong?

- Each library had one or more major flaw that interfered with the library’s effective operation.

- None of the flaws were the fault of the library director.

- How could a library director anticipate the mistakes other people might make?
Whose fault?

- Interviewed dozens of librarians
- Collected hundreds of personal experiences
- Most problems started with building professionals who knew nothing about libraries
The Library’s Mistakes

- Decision-making process was flawed.
- Responsibilities were not clearly assigned.
- Neither Board nor Director understood the importance of politics or the media.
- Board, Director, and staff saw their job too narrowly. They believed what they were told.
Building projects are intensely political

- May require a sales tax or bond election
- Community is always divided
- You’re in competition with other projects
- If the library is funded, others will not get their rec center or hockey rink or animal shelter
- Some will continue to oppose the library project for years
Surviving the Political Process

- You need friends
- You need articulate and influential people on your side
- Strengthen existing library groups
- Create new library groups
- Keep them informed and ask for their help
- Build strength on the Board
Bring the Community Along

- Create a buzz of enthusiasm
- Make sure everyone’s “in the know”
- The community must take ownership of the project as early as possible
Know the Law

- Library employees may educate and inform the public. They may not lobby.

- Library Friends and Foundations are usually 501(c)3. They may not engage in political activities.

- Consider forming a Political Action Committee
Education VS. Political Action

Library Staff may and should:

- educate the public about the need.
- emphasize enhanced services
- emphasize safety issues.
- emphasize services to children and seniors.
- simplify the message
- stay on message
Education VS. Political Action

- Neither the library nor the Friends nor the Foundation may say “Vote for the sales tax.”

- Library staff may not be officially involved in a political action committee. Friends and Foundation members may “change hats”

- Check with your election commission about other rules
Do You Need to Sell Your Project?
The Case Statement

- You need one simple story
- The case statement will become your marching song
- You’ll use it and adapt it for all PR purposes
- It must work for local government, the Rotary Club, publicity materials, and the local newspaper
- You might have one short and one longer version
Do You Need to Sell Your Project?  
The Case Statement

- The story must be short and compelling
- The story must tell people why the project will change their lives
- Hammer out a written statement.
- Don’t get flowery. Don’t use long sentences
- Don’t write a laundry list
- Stay on message. Find ways to repeat the message
Who Does What?

- Library Director
- Library Staff
- Board of Trustees
- Individual Board members

- Local government officials
- Patrons
- Supporters
The Library Director

Think of the Director as a pivot around whom much of the action takes place.

Often means she gets caught in the middle.

Overworked.

May be the one with the best understanding of the library.

Little knowledge of capital projects.
Start out on the right foot

Work with all stakeholders to establish ground rules

Be sure Board, local government, and community understand the ground rules and play by them
The Library Director

- You can’t do two jobs at once
- Delegate as many of your regular duties as possible
- Don’t let yourself become tired, angry, or careless
You know libraries
You know what’s been happening in the field
You are best equipped to plan a library that meets the needs of your community
You must find the time and the resources to make your vision a reality
You must believe in yourself!
Library Board’s Input

- You have resources the director may lack. You probably have a board member
  - with strong political skills
  - with strong fiscal/accounting skills
  - With strong communication skills
  - With strong practical/blue collar skills
Some decisions must be made by the full board. Which ones?

You are more effective as individuals and in small groups than as a full board.

How can you use individual talents in the most effective way?

Who can best support and advise the director (subcommittee?)
Working Together

- Board and Director must trust one another
- They must have each other’s back
- If a conflict arises, settle it.
- Don’t let conflict fester.
- Keep it inside the board room
- No leaks!
Working Together - The Library Staff

- Staff must be onboard
- They must have input into decision-making
- Their institutional memory can catch mistakes
- They’re your best promoters
Decision-Making Process

- Agree in advance—who decides what?
- What decisions may Director make independently
- What decisions may board make without local government input
- How will “Deciders” get the information needed to make good decisions?
Money is the most contentious issue.

Politicians run on cutting spending

Some local officials voted against the library project

Don’t assume budgets are elastic

Accusing the library of fiscal irresponsibility may be good politics
Decision-Making Process

- How much money can the director obligate without Board approval?
- How much can the Board obligate without local government approval?
- Who’s keeping track?
- Are decisions to obligate funds officially recorded and shared?
- Does the contractor understand and work within the process?
Some decisions are deadly!

- Controversial decisions are inevitable. Be aware of them.
- Important that the Board have the Library Director’s back.
- Board should sign off on controversial decisions and take the rap if necessary.
- The library director has a job and a career to worry about.
Those Chairs are hideous!!!
Who’s in Charge?

- The buck must stop with someone.
- Preferably a professional project manager (not paid by architect or contractor) who reports to the board.
- Less desirable - a professional project manager who reports to local government.
- **Not** the library director or board member.
The Project manager

- Lots of names like commissioner or clerk of work.
- Must understand and comply with the decision-making process
- Must not make independent decisions
- Must understand the importance of financial record keeping
The Project manager:
- Must be a good communicator
- Must not be a lone wolf
- Must be comfortable working with women
- Must have specific expertise in building design and construction
- Must not be the mayor’s brother-in-law
New Building

- Will a new site be selected? How?
- Does the local government unit own the site? Is that okay???
- Will construction affect library’s operation?
New Addition

- Will the library continue to operate during construction?
- If so, how will work be sequenced to have the least impact on the library’s operation?
- Will it move to temporary quarters during construction?
- How do the two options compare in cost?
Renovation: Not easy or cheap

- Most of the work focuses on the interior
- Usually impossible to remain open during construction.
- Temporary quarters needed
- Working around an existing structure may be harder than starting from scratch.
- It may be surprisingly expensive and require greater skill
Lines of Communication

- The disappearing floor
- One of director’s biggest jobs is getting everyone on the same page
- Don’t assume building professionals communicate with each other.
- Identify a local government liaison
- Regular (weekly?) written reports from everyone to everyone
- Email’s usually fine
Write it Down

- Keep a written record of every decision
- Include it in your weekly reports
- By writing it down, you make it official
- Let everyone have a chance to disagree
- Your written records will usually stand up in court.
- They can prevent expensive change orders
Take Minutes but Call Them Summaries

- Often no record of meetings or “charrettes”
- Attenders often have different memories
- Record every significant decision
- Your recordings become official if no one disagrees
Human Relations 101

More people will read and agree with your minutes:

- if they’re conversational in tone
- if you make people sound wise or clever

We all like to see our names in print. Feel free to improve on nature. Don’t make yourself the smartest bulb on the tree but make sure your opinion is represented.
Building Trades 101

- You need to know a lot about buildings
- You won’t catch the mistake if you can’t talk the talk
- Take classes
- Buy books
- Visit many, many libraries
Learn About

- Vocabulary
- Architectural plans (blueprints)
- HVAC systems
- Electrical Systems
- Computer networks
- Acoustics
- Energy Efficient systems
Learn About Building Delivery Systems

Design/Bid/Build

- The traditional system
- Most common in US
- Owner contracts separately with architect/design firm and contractor
- Design and construction functions separate
Learn About Building Delivery Systems

Construction Management at-Risk

- Owner contracts separately with architect/design firm and contractor
- Contractor selected early before plans are complete
- Contractor has more input into design process and can construct building for agreed upon fee
- Faster
Learn About Building Delivery Systems

Design-Build

- Owner contracts with one entity
- One design and build contract
- Single point of responsibility
- Design and construction functions separate
Learn About Building Delivery Systems

Which is best?

- Architects oppose design-build. They see themselves as owner’s representative in traditional system. May or may not be true

- Contractors like design-build. They point out that building professionals can’t easily blame one another at owner’s expense with other systems
Learn About Building Delivery Systems

Which is best?

- By law, architects are required only to exercise reasonable care—ordinary skill and competence.

- Contractors are held to a higher standard. They must get it right.

- All participants are usually held to the contractor’s standard with Design-Build.
The World of Architects

- Interviews with many librarians
- Emails from librarians
- Tips and tales from librarians
- Most of their projects had one or more flaws
- Most blame the architects
Unfair Criticism?

- Most contact is with the architects
- Librarians relate easily with architects
- Well educated, articulate professionals
- Often highly creative
- Skilled at selling their wares
- Architects think they know more about libraries than they do
You and Your Architect

- American Institute of Architects (AIA) publication
- Sixteen-page booklet
- Developed by a group of architects, owners, lawyers, and insurance risk managers
- Presents the AIA’s interpretation of the architect’s role and responsibilities,
More From AIA

- AIA forms are the standard in the industry
- They have regulated transactions within the building trades since 1888
- AIA Publications spell out the legal relationships among owners, architects, contractors and subcontractors.
- AIA forms have been tested in the courts, and legal interpretations are available.
Architects Like Library Projects

- Large, expensive projects
- Larger fee
- Larger open space to design
- More creative possibilities
- Potential for awards
Choosing the Architects

- As long a list as possible
- Local choice brings more oversight
- Regional choice brings more library expertise
- Avoid very distant firm. May involve a second local firm you didn’t choose.
Visit their building projects

- Don’t stop at libraries
- Does form follow function?
- Try to discover some the architect isn’t bragging about
- Is there wasted space?
- Is the interior quiet?
- Was money spent on unnecessary features?
Interview Librarians

- Did they have a good experience? Did they part friends?
- Were architects receptive to their suggestions?
- Did architects have their own agenda?
- Did they remember what they were told?
- Did architects get along well with the contractors?
- What went wrong?
- What would they do differently?
Interview Architects

- Did they listen more than talk?
- Ask questions that reveal their image of a library
- Was their presentation too slick?
- Did they ask the right questions?
- Did they communicate in jargon?
Interview Architects

- Do they understand and accept your budget?
- Do they understand libraries are poor
- While you’re dealing with big money you may forget the bad times
- You’ll need to be able to operate the library with low maintenance costs and a small staff
Danger Signs

- Building that “makes a statement”
- Cathedral ceilings
- Dramatic staircases
- Atria
- Features that have little practical function
- Weakness on technical issues
- Engineers not part of the team
Favorable Signs

- Willingness to participate in fund-raising
- Willingness to attend public meetings
- Inclusion of presentation-quality visual materials, floor plans, material boards, renderings, and even computer model walk-through imaging.
One Design Phase or Two??

- Is funding in place? If not, you may need a preliminary or conceptual plan.
- Provides the footprint and general design of the new building.
- Includes an itemized cost estimate (how much library you can build with how much money)
- Cost: $10,000-$100,000
One Design Phase or Two??

- Preliminary plan Includes renderings and other visuals to display. Help you sell the project to public and local government.

- You may want flexible contract- freedom to choose a different firm for the actual project if things don’t go well
The Architect’s Contract

- B141- the Owner-Architect Agreement
- Also known as the architect’s contract
- Recommended by the AIA
- Includes references to other sources outside the written contract
- “Attached hereto and made a part hereof “
- May make all the difference in holding architects responsible
- Get all referenced items
After the Architects Are Hired

- First meeting establishes the relationship
- Prepare for the meeting with an agenda and written notes
- Speak the language (glossary of architectural terms)
- This is a conference between colleagues, not a doctor-patient discussion
- Don’t get swept away by their enthusiasm
- Don’t tell them the how to do their job
- They’re working for the library
What Should the Architects Know

- Architects rarely design a library.
- Begin their library education
- What makes a library different?
- Children and seniors have different needs
- Lighting is different
- Sound-dampening is needed
- Loud machinery is unacceptable in some places
What Should the Architects Know

- Where and how staff do their work
- Number of patrons will use the public computers, collaborative studies, restrooms, or meeting rooms at one time
- One public entrance. Other exterior doors are fire exits.
- How the security system for materials impacts design
- Their goal is to find every inch of useful public space possible
The Architects’ Homework

- Hand out a list of basic requirements
- Make it as comprehensive as possible
- Refer to it at the next meeting (make sure they’ve read it)
- Group meetings are necessary but ineffective (easy to snow large groups)
- Arrange some meetings with just the library director
Establishing Priorities

- Your list of wants is very long.
- What can you live without?
- What could cause major problems in the future?
- When are you flexible and what’s not up for discussion?
Establishing Priorities

- Architects must be told which decisions are important to you.
- Don’t make your architects guess. They’ll guess wrong.
- Many decisions can be made by the Board or by the Architects or even by the general public
- Some decisions must be made by the library director. Agree on what they are
Sleeping Beauty Complex

- Libraries are changing rapidly
- Today’s stack area may be tomorrow’s computer lab
- Architects never see a building after it’s finished
- Electrical requirements will increase
- Electrical outlets are cheap. Rewiring a building is very expensive
Choosing a Contractor

- Not usually our decision
- Perhaps the best thing you can do is keep others on your team from taking shortcuts.
- Send out a detailed RFP (Don’t compare apples with oranges
- Get references from banks, suppliers, and insurance companies
- Require backup detail (sources, subcontractors, etc.)
- Be suspicious of boilerplate estimates
Choosing a Contractor

- Look for financial stability
- Contractors need extensive assets
- Library project no place for a small business
- Contractors do go bankrupt
- Require performance and payment bonds for carrying out the work
Contract for Construction

- Most important document in any legal dispute
- Standard AIA form common
- Require a Contract Bond
- Library’s attorney should understand construction law
- Contractor must be held responsible for mistakes
- Warranty clause must protect the library