

Main Library Renovation Project
Open Meeting with the Campus Community
November 12, 2003

Joe Branin welcomed the attendees and introduced Louis Ulman (LU), Chair of the Council on Libraries and Information Technology, the University Senate committee that provides oversight of both the Libraries and the Office of the Chief Information Officer. This is one of many opportunities to provide comments on the renovation process. Feedback is needed, and changes will be made in response to comments from the community. Contact him at ulman.1@osu.edu with anything you may want the Council to look into; the Council meets once a month during the academic year.

Joe Branin (JB): We're at the design concept stage. Listen to what the architects have to say, but the most important thing is your reaction to what they present. We are very interested in your honest opinions. He then introduced Graham Gund, the Design Architect and George Acock, the Architect of Record.

Graham Gund (GG): All three schemes that will be presented include the restoration of the 1913 building, taking off the pavilions and restoring the façade of the original building, removing the floor from the middle of the Grand Reading Room, adding a reading room with a focus to the west, and restoring the curve of the Oval to the west of the building. At present there is no access from the western side; all three schemes have access from the west and east and remove the entrances from the north and south.

George Acock (GA): He remembers as a new student coming into the building, into the lobby and up the marble staircase into the great reading room with the vaulted ceiling. You could then go up to the third level and look out from the balconies over the Oval. The space he remembers most were the stacks, which were the mirror image of Room 210. It was a special place; now things are homely instead of beautiful.

GG: Scheme A has an east/west corridor ca. 20 feet wide, which could be used for displays to exhibit the richness of the collections. This scheme would reuse the front entrance and build a new west entrance with broad steps and a colonnade along Neil Avenue. It keeps the tower and opens two light wells; the light coming down in a regular pattern would serve as an orientation point.

Scheme B has the same east/west access, but has a 25 ft. wide light well extending along the east west corridor, with balconies and bridges. The first three stories would be open to the light well with windows on the upper floors. This scheme would have very memorable space and easy orientation. There would also be an expanded glass bay facing Mirror Lake.

Scheme C has the fewest floors and the densest collection space per floor. As with Scheme A there would be two light wells on the east/west access corridor.

We seem to be in different universes. All that's being talked about here are light and beautiful spaces; the thing that concerns the Humanities is collections. They want to have books available to browse on the shelves, and none of these plans holds more books than the present building. They don't care if it's beautiful; they want to have a million more books. Future generations will be upset with the lack of collection size. Why aren't we talking about more books and not beautiful spaces? JB: Volume capacity is important, but a library also needs spaces for services, study, and technology—the library needs to be a balanced building. One of the reasons we're doing this project is because the current building is inadequate. Faculty: We understand the need for balance, but the books need to be the focus of the library. MM: Compact shelving may help us achieve that goal; it has worked well in other library locations on campus. JB: Major libraries are moving to off site storage. Faculty: What are the on site capacities of the major libraries? LU: In order to have a larger collection we would need to have a bigger building. Basic constraints are the amount of money available and the need to be sensitive to the site. We're trying to get the best building for the money and the site. We'd like to have at least two million volumes in the building, but we don't have the money.

What would you do with the tower? GG: The tower would be used for other purposes—human space, with the collections in other portions of the building. It's difficult to manage collections in vertical space; easier to manage horizontally. The tower could stay as an icon, but be transformed into a 21st century version of a tower.

We're also concerned about the size of the collections. How would you prioritize the importance of the collection? You seem to be emphasizing beauty over collection size. JB: The amount of space to be taken by the collection will be 45%. Memorable spaces and large collection size are not mutually exclusive. Given the budget and the site we can't have a much larger collection.

Which scheme would allow for future expansion? JB: Future expansion is probably not an option. Illinois has been addition after addition for decades. They are now moving toward remote storage. We add ca. 100,000/year. All libraries on campus are reaching, or at, capacity. The only way we can survive is either by building more space or by moving off site to a depository. The latter is the only viable option.

There will be more disability students in the future. Which option will be best for folks who are in wheelchairs or with seeing-eye dogs? The more horizontal space, the easier it will be to manage for security, efficiency, disabled, etc. Scheme B presents the most clarity and orientation.

What is the difference in square footage? The tower has more square feet, but not as usable.

JM: All three schemes are handicapped accessible. Tower would have lesser-used spaces. Collections will be on the lowest levels in all three schemes.

JB: When we started three years ago we were concentrating on the east side of the campus. As the project has progressed, the west has become more important. There will be two entrances, rather than a back and a front. He's charged with making it a great open library.

Different folks have different needs. Will there be spaces for Grad Students to use? Large reading rooms don't meet the needs of graduate students. DZ: We're trying to create those types of spaces to use for research purposes. JB: Going to have a variety of spaces to meet the variety of needs. The need for group study spaces seems to be growing. DZ: Reading Rooms won't be dedicated to undergraduate use, but will have multiple uses.

What about Maps? JB: Still in question.

How about the Cartoon Research Library? JB: Would like to consolidate Special Collections.

Is there a possibility of tunnels to connect with other buildings? JB: No.

Will the infrastructure be improved? YJ: Comfort issues and life safety will be improved.

Will Rare Books stay here? JB: Rare books and special collections will be an important, integral part of the building.

There's need for more deliveries from the Depository.

Will the building be closed and materials and staff relocated? JB: The current plan is to move collections and staff to ABB building on Ackerman Road. The intent is to have all services and collections available. Faculty: What about parking at ABB? JB: ABB has very adequate parking. Faculty: Have we looked at other buildings that may be available on central campus? WB: We have looked at Brown and Pomerene and will continue to look for available space on central campus.

What about technology in the building? DZ: We are trying to get the infrastructure to be as flexible as possible to meet future requirements.

What about graduate carrels? Where are graduate students going to be able to work during construction? Many of them do not have assigned spaces in their departments.

How will we guard against loss of books during the moves? JB: We'll be using a professional moving firm that we've used successfully in moving collections on campus.

Will ETC and other Reading Room collections retain their identify at ABB?

When would construction begin? JB: Construction would begin in 2005 and the building would be unavailable for 2-3 years.

Collections not being available on site will impact on how assignments are made to graduate students, etc. We need to work closely with the library on phasing and the transition during that period. Involvement of graduates in research will also be impacted.

Transportation will also be an issue. JB: We have an obligation to keep all services available during the transition. We'll need to use a variety of ways to keep collections and services available.

Communication needs to be kept open; we need to work together—even more important now. It's important to keep undergraduate, graduate and faculty involvement. JB: He, Wes Boomgaarden, and Jim Bracken are available to attend department and college meetings.

During the construction will all other libraries on campus be open? JB: They should all be functionally available.

JB: Is anyone willing to give comments on the three schemes.

Designs without the tower will be more people friendly. The less need to travel vertically the better. Horizontal flow is important. The less time spent in elevators, the better.

What is the difference between schemes B and C? GG: Scheme B is more easily oriented. Scheme C has a broader footprint and is better for storing books. The tower is only memorable from the outside.

Will the grand staircase be restored? GG: There is no plan to restore the interior grand staircase.

The visual landmark would go with Scheme B, but we would have a much better campus orientation and would better serve the folks on the west side of campus.