Russell Library 2020 Vision Statement

Executive Summary

The Russell Library of 2020 includes:

- ADA-compliant stacks and spaces.
- Adaptable staff workstations and spaces with robust technological capabilities.
- Administration offices within the Library.
- Beautiful, welcoming entrance and lobby that draws patrons into the Library.
- Café.
- Children’s spaces designed with enticing sensory concepts for entertainment, education and exploration.
- Energy-efficient, integrated HVAC system – in a LEED-certified facility.
- Digital studio to create and share video and audio works.
- Display/exhibition spaces for staff, community groups, and individual exhibitors.
- Grand reading room in the original 19th century building.
- Interactive spaces for all for hands-on work alone and in groups.
- Large cultural performance space, in addition to expanded Hubbard Room.
- Makerspace equipped to accommodate a variety of creative endeavors, particularly those in the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, & Math) realm.
- Meeting rooms and a business center with appropriate technology and software.
- Middletown Local History digitization lab and website for local history.
- Parking for all staff and public!
- Passport center.
- Retail space with Friends of Russell Library bookstore and adjacent workspaces.
- Safety and security systems and policies to protect all.
- Service desk in the lobby with staff to assist and guide patrons.
- Sound-proof cubicles for reading, tutoring or study.
- Staff lounge away from the public areas.
- Teen Services expanded into a full-service library, with Teen Librarian.
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Introduction

This vision of the completed 2020 Russell Library will have been achieved through a comprehensive renovation of the entire existing library interior with new MEP (Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing) systems, as well as additions and alterations according to the following process:

In one year: A new Russell Library Director will provide input to round out the initial library staff/ board of trustees and public input from the strategic planning program the board has shared with the city.

In two years: A building consultant/library planning expert will interpret the library's program and develop a schematic plan and budget for the renovated, altered new library with additions.

In three years: With a plan and a budget, the board of trustees will begin discussions with the City about a process leading to a public referendum as well as an application to the State for library construction cost assistance.

Best case scenario for this entire process, 3-4 years.

Construction of the new library could begin as soon as 5 years from today assuming a successful referendum, a complete design process with library board and city agency's review and approval, bidding and negotiating all complete.

Background

It is the year 2020. Middletown, Connecticut is a thriving city, rich in history and culture. The city's residents celebrate their diversity and support each other through economic hard times, inclement weather, and personal tragedy. Middletown’s population has grown steadily since its founding in 1650, and is projected to exceed 50,000 by the end of 2020. Its many industries, shops and restaurants have made it a New England destination, providing jobs and business opportunities to all its citizens.

Since 1875, Russell Library has served the people of Middletown and the surrounding area. The mission of the library remains as valid as ever in 2020:

Russell Library is "A Bridge to the Future of Middletown," dedicated to providing the diverse community with the highest quality of library service, reliable information, and lifelong educational, recreational and cultural resources for all ages, abilities and backgrounds. We help children explore the world around and within them, enable teens to grow towards new understandings, and ensure that adults have access to the fullness
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of human experience. The mission of the Russell Library Company, which is derived from its charter, is to receive, hold and manage the property and income of the corporation, from whatever source derived; and to establish, increase and maintain a free public library in the City of Middletown.

Russell Library embraces the public library mission of leveling the playing field—providing everyone with access to the information, tools and skills they need to make their way in the world and to be fulfilled as human beings.

However, the way Russell fulfills its mission has changed greatly as the needs and opportunities of the Middletown community have evolved, and as information resources and technology have advanced. The one constant that can be relied on is change—ever-accelerating change. Russell Library spaces, infrastructure, systems and services are designed to be flexible and easily adaptable to changing needs, technologies and resources. Although those changes are impossible to predict, the certainty of disruptive change has been designed into the Library.

One trend that has only grown stronger is the increasing interactivity of library resources and services. In the past, libraries were largely places where patrons consumed information and cultural works—they looked up how to fix their car or settled in to read their favorite mystery. To a limited extent the library also served as a place to create and collaborate, but most patrons sought in the library merely a quiet place to find information and to read.

But nowadays libraries have become places for the creation as well as the consumption of information and knowledge. Patrons share their opinions in book discussion groups, learn skills in hands-on workshops, and create music, movies and works of art. The library, once a place for reading and solitary study, has become a social and creative space as well (for example, the long-standing Russell Library Veterans’ Writing Group, and the Asian-themed young adult interest group Otakus of Russell Library). Libraries provide access to virtual social and creative spaces, including social media, crowd sourcing and other collaborative activities. Patrons can share their ideas and creative works with others not just locally but anywhere in the world.

What follows is a summary of how the flexible spaces and services of Russell Library serve the Middletown community in 2020.

Lobby and Circulation

The entrance to Russell Library embodies the library’s accessibility to all, and the central place it holds in the community. Outside the entrance there is a space for cars to drop off passengers, and the lobby is free of obstructions and easily accessible to those in wheelchairs or with strollers. The entrance draws people into the Library with a view into the
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sunlit, enclosed courtyard and clear sightlines to other areas on the first floor.

Although Russell still has a print book collection, it is gradually growing smaller and the circulation of print books is lower. The provision of audio and video (AV) works is now primarily online, so fewer CDs and DVDs circulate. However, the circulation of devices with which to access and use library resources has increased, as has the use of the Library’s electronic books, AV, magazines, and other online resources.

The most important resources the Library offers are the people who work here. Near the entrance, staff members provide assistance at a single desk that incorporates the functions of circulation, check in, and information services. Adjacent but shielded from view is an area with workstations for circulation staff, with ample space to sort returned materials and interlibrary loan items waiting for pickup.

The Library has been designed to make it easy for patrons move from the lobby to any place in the facility. Clear, uncluttered, and uniform signage directs people to the stacks, teen and children’s areas, and the Friends bookstore/retail space. Electronic signs—which are quickly and easily updated--inform people of the day’s meetings and events and where in the library they are taking place.

It is a high priority to maintain the Library as a safe, secure space for all to use and enjoy. Security systems and policies are in place to keep patrons and staff safe and library materials and equipment secure, with minimal impact on access into the Library. The lobby contains an area for security services, with camera feeds and workstations. Security officers circulate through the building on a regular schedule, but are reachable via intercom, silent alarm, or cell phone.

Information Services and Adult Services

Information Services staff are fully integrated into the Library’s activities and services. They are scheduled to work at the lobby desk all hours that the Library is open, and maintain a presence as well near the Makerspace and Digital Studio on the second floor. They provide in-depth research assistance one-on-one and in small groups, as well as informational talks for larger groups about library services and resources. Librarians also organize interactive programs and events that inform, engage and entertain while promoting community discussion. Information Services staff work with other librarians to select titles for the adult collections—print and electronic—and to evaluate the use and value of currently held resources.
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resources. They keep up with trends in order to identify new equipment, systems and resources that best meet the needs of Middletown’s adult population.

The stacks have been made to fit onto one floor, on shelving that exceeds the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, giving patrons in wheelchairs or with strollers unfettered access to our entire collection. The reading room has been retained as a beautiful, quiet space for reading, study and reflection. Within the reading room, there are transparent study rooms that can be scheduled for single use or one-on-one meetings and tutoring sessions. All areas in the reading room are fully networked; patrons can easily connect through their own devices or by checking out a device from the Library.

A Makerspace with adjacent kitchen, storage and networking capabilities, is used for hands-on workshops from flower arranging to games creation. Several smaller meeting rooms are available for library and community groups; one is set up as a fully-networked business center, with standard office equipment but also large format scanning/printing capabilities and access to business software. This room is scheduled by entrepreneurs and businesses with a need for specialized equipment or additional space to do project work.

The Frances (Frances Russell Auditorium) is an adult cultural performance space with a stage, seating for 500, and state-of-the-art sound, lighting and projection. The expanded Hubbard Room is easily configurable into two or three smaller spaces or a single lecture hall. Both The Frances and the Hubbard Room can be accessed and secured separately from the Library, with their own restrooms and storage space. This enables the Library to rent the spaces to for-profit companies, or reserve them free of charge to non-profit groups, at times when the Library is closed. The common lobby and backstage areas have been designed so that they can be used by walkers in inclement weather. The lobby contains a technology-enabled gallery/exhibition space for displays by individuals, schools and community groups.

Children’s Services

Children’s Services is a self-contained library within Russell, with its own collections, programming, events and interactive spaces. It is a space designed for children and welcoming to all—flooded with natural light, with a variety of portable, colorful furniture built for children and their caregivers, and with moveable, transparent dividers so children can create their own spaces.

As with the adult collection, the print book collection has become smaller, fitting into low-level, ADA-compliant shelving that is easily and intuitively browseable by children.
Equipment and devices are available throughout the department for children to discover and use. Resources are suitable for children and their interests. Surfaces and devices in the department are easily cleaned and sanitized. Children and their parents often bring their own devices to seamlessly connect to the Library’s network and children’s resources; others use devices in the area or check them out to use at home.

Children’s Services staff members regularly evaluate existing children’s resources and select those that best meet the needs of their patrons. They consult parents, elementary and preschool teachers and local day care staff on new children’s services and programming.

Small and large group areas accommodate a variety of children’s programming as well as parenting space. An exhibit area allows children and classes to display their work for the community.

**Teen Services**

Teen Services is another self-contained library within Russell, with its own collections, programming, events and interactive spaces. Teen Services is in a defined, but visible space with clear sightlines throughout and into the enclosed courtyard. The Teen Librarian’s office is in the area, so the librarian is accessible to teens when they need assistance or guidance. The Teen Librarian also maintains regular contact with teachers in local middle and high schools, to evaluate and select new resources of particular value to teens. Teens value their autonomy and appreciate the opportunity to have their say; the Teen Librarian provides this by leading the Teen Advisory Board (TAB) to explore new technologies for adoption by the library, and discuss teen programming and collaborations with school and community groups.

The Teen Librarian and other staff regularly evaluate existing teen resources and select those that best meet the needs of their patrons. Devices designed and configured for teen use are available throughout the space. Small and large group areas accommodate a variety of teen programming, meetings, tutoring and other activities. An exhibit space allows teen groups, classes and individuals to display their work for the community.

The teen print collection of book series and graphic novels are on ADA-compliant shelving that is easily and intuitively browseable by teens. Equipment and devices are available for teens to use to find online materials that match their age and interests. They can also bring their own devices and easily connect to the Library’s network and resources.
Local History

The librarian in charge of the Middletown Room maintains a close working relationship with the other local history organizations in Middletown, as well as libraries and historical societies in nearby towns. The digitization of local maps, documents, archives, photographs and other materials is an ongoing, cooperative effort led by Russell Library; the digitized objects are cataloged and made available to the public through the Middletown Local History site. The digital studio used for this work is also available to patrons. They bring their documents, photographs and other materials to the studio to scan or print, with the option to upload them into the Middletown Local History site so they are available for others to discover. The Library preserves original documents, photographs and artifacts—these are important for many kinds of research. They are preserved in climate-controlled storage in the Middletown Room, which is furnished with appropriate study spaces for the safe use of fragile materials.

Technology Services

Technology Services encompasses the traditional acquiring and making available of library materials, with the development and maintenance of its network infrastructure. Spaces in Technology Services are designed to be flexible, with robust data and electrical access to every work area in the space, even areas that do not currently need it.

Print materials continue to be acquired, although a smaller number than in the former print-based days. However, negotiating and maintaining access to electronic materials is at least as complex and time-consuming as acquiring and maintaining print collections. Technology Services staff have powerful workstations with programs that enable them to troubleshoot problems with resource access, track and report on the use of each resource the Library provides, and document the terms of contracts. Russell Library shares with other area libraries an online catalog and many electronic resources via Libraries Online (LION), a library cooperative. Technology Services staff work closely with LION and other local, state and regional groups to negotiate access to resources at a price that is affordable and cost effective. Through these collaborations, Russell Library patrons can find and use materials that used to be in ‘hidden collections,’ impossible to discover without travelling to the library that owned them.
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Area libraries share the expertise of a staff person to repair, process and secure print materials; the service is based at Russell and the cost shared among participating libraries. The work is done in a secure area with a sink, temperature and humidity controls, ventilation, and task lighting. An adjacent loading dock facilitates the delivery of electronic devices, peripherals, supplies, interlibrary loan materials and Friends donations. This space also serves as a central Library mailroom, supply storage, packing and delivery center, and copy center for staff. This is adjacent to the freight elevator, used by staff and separate from the public elevator.

The Technology Services staff also assess the use of devices and equipment throughout the Library, work with patrons and library staff to determine future technology needs, and replace old equipment as needed. They work closely with LION and other library groups to share systems and provide printing, creation and specialized software to our patrons. A secure storage area is large enough to hold new and used equipment for deployment, and has a large counter space to repair, configure and test computer equipment. Cloud storage—secure, cost-effective storage via the Internet—is the primary means of backup for Library systems and files, with an off-site file server as a redundant backup system.

Other Staff Areas

Beautiful, technology-enabled, flexible spaces are necessary but not sufficient to make Russell Library extraordinary. It is the people who work at the Library that make it an accepting, welcoming and useful place for our patrons. To support staff in their work to fulfill Russell’s mission, there are flexible workspaces in every department, easily configurable to adapt to changes in staffing, technology and workflow. Adequate area and task lighting is a high priority. A staff lounge, not accessible to the public, provides a place for staff to eat meals and relax away from their work area. Staff parking is on the north side of the facility.

The Library’s administrative offices are within the building, enhancing communication between staff and administration, and increasing the accessibility of library leadership to patrons and visitors.

Infrastructure

The structural issues inherent in a building with so many additions and levels are many and challenging. The major issues with roof leaks and load-bearing floors have been addressed, and new problems are resolved as they present themselves. An energy-efficient, integrated HVAC (Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning) system is in place, and the building is LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified.

Russell Library now has the capability to easily adapt to new technologies, services and programs. There are power outlets conveniently located throughout the Library. A VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) system is installed in both public and staff areas, with a separate
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An extensive chase system is in place to facilitate the running of cables and wiring throughout the building, with easy access in order to make changes.

Throughout the Library, a flexible, expandable network has been designed to provide adequate computer access and networking for current uses, and easy access and expandability for future changes. The network is capable of fully supporting the following functions: Security system, meeting/study spaces with updated AV, TV, and Internet capability, ADA/assistive technology, computer instruction classrooms, digitization centers for local history and other materials, exhibit and gallery spaces, small business center, creative labs and digital studios for adults, teens and children, technology-enabled meeting rooms and collaborative spaces. The network design supports flexible spaces, redundancy and growth, and the wireless network can be linked to a large number and variety of patron devices.

Friends of Russell Library and Retail Space

The Friends of the Russell Library continue their long tradition of providing Russell with financial and community support— their time and energy is much appreciated! The Friends accept donations of print books and provide them for sale in their bookstore. The bookstore includes a café that is managed by an outside vendor, for the convenience of Russell patrons and bookstore customers. There is also an area that provides passport services and photos for a small fee. A security gate between the Library and the bookstore indicates when a patron is bringing in library materials. This retail space provides a modest amount of revenue to support library services and resources.

There is an adjoining sorting room in the back, with workstations and stacks adequate to efficiently evaluate, sort and search materials, and to offer online as well as onsite purchases. There is also a volunteer/staff space with coffee, a sink and a seating area. Friends volunteers and Russell Library staff cooperate to raise the visibility of the Library and Middletown. The bookstore attracts book lovers from the surrounding area who then discover other library services and programs, as well as Middletown restaurants and shops.
Conclusion

In 2020, Russell Library is well-positioned to meet current and future challenges. With a resourceful, expert, dedicated staff, and flexible, technology-enabled spaces and systems, Russell serves the Middletown community and beyond as a cultural center, research hub, and laboratory for community exploration, discovery and creativity. It also continues to serve those who seek a place conducive to study and quiet reflection. Russell Library is in a unique position to serve all members of the Middletown community, and to attract newcomers to enrich the city’s culture and coffers.

--Prepared by Pat Tully, Interim Assistant Library Director, Russell Library
Approved by the Board of Trustees, May 19, 2015

Sources

- 2015 Department Head perspectives on space needs (see Appendices).
- 2013 report from Jeff Hoover, the Cambridge, MA library architect who visited Russell Library as part of the Strategic Plan.
- 2012 and 2013 reports from Assistant Library Director Vince Juliano on Russell Library space and a staff visit to East Hartford Public Library.
- 2014 TLB Architecture’s Courtyard Enclosure Study.
- 2013 Russell Library Building Program.