

Introduction: Planning for the Next Generation of Libraries

Public libraries in Sonoma County have a long history of promoting literacy and life-long learning, dating back to the Petaluma Library which opened in 1878. Since 1975, library services have been provided throughout the county by the Sonoma County Library. The Sonoma County Library is an independent agency created by the cities in the county and the County of Sonoma operating under a Joint Powers Agreement.

In 1998, the Library Commission initiated a comprehensive look at the Sonoma County Library and how it could be improved. The first step, completed in October of 2000, was a Strategic Plan that describes five goals to guide future Library efforts. The ability to achieve three of these goals — providing excellent collections and services, utilizing user-friendly technology, and providing welcoming environments for patrons — is directly affected by the size and infrastructure of the library facilities. This Facilities Master Plan evaluates the ability of the existing library facilities to meet these goals and offers recommendations on how facilities can be improved to better serve the communities.

The recommendations made in the Facilities Master Plan are the product of an extensive community-based planning process that reflects the needs expressed by thousands of Sonoma County residents. Through focus groups, patron surveys, Library staff interviews and surveys, patron mapping exercises, a visioning workshop, dozens of community meetings, and the oversight of an advisory County Library Committee and the Sonoma County Library Commission, the collective voice of county residents has helped shape the Master Plan. In all, 28 community meetings were conducted as part of the planning process. The vision generated from this process is one of a Library that strengthens traditional services such as collections and embraces new technologies and services such as multi-media information and distance learning. The Library can become a true educational and cultural community center, bringing people together in educational programs, homework centers, and mentoring programs, while remaining firmly rooted in its commitment to equitable library services throughout the county. The Facilities Master Plan is a roadmap for the Library, the County government, and each city to reaching this community vision for improved library service through improved facilities.

The Need: Serving a Growing and Changing Community

The relationship between service levels and the number of people served is direct: the greater the number of people, the greater number of books, chairs, tables, and computers that are needed. For over two decades, the Sonoma County Library has struggled to keep pace with the growing size and diversity of the county's population. Since 1980, the county population has increased a total of 53%, while the size of all library facilities combined has grown only 25%. If facilities are not improved, this shortfall will only get worse, as projections indicate the county population will grow another 30% by 2025 with higher



Thousands of County residents have helped define the vision for improved libraries in the Facilities Master Plan.

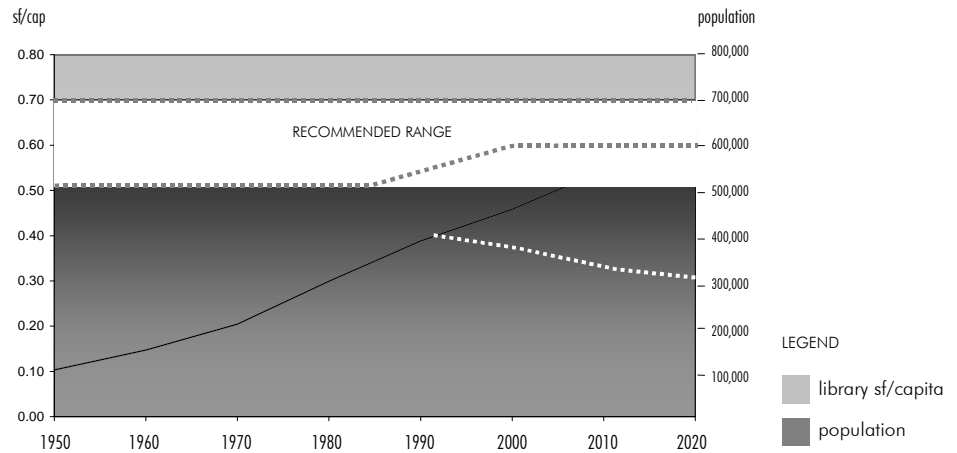
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Technology expands the Library's services.

growth rates among traditional library users — seniors and children. Library usage is also increasing. Between 2000 and 2002, circulation of library materials has increased 17%. More people using the same amount of resources more frequently means a reduction in services.

Library Square Footage per Capita has Decreased as the Population has Increased



Source: Building area from the Sonoma County Library; population data from the U.S. Bureau of Census

In addition to an increase in total numbers, the population is also growing in diversity. Since 1990, the number of non-white residents has doubled. Sonoma County's diverse population requires a collection that addresses the needs and interests of different age groups, learning abilities, and ethnicities. Libraries have also seen a growth in how information is conveyed. Audio/visual materials and digital information have joined the printed word in today's libraries. Such trends in demographics and technology also create a need for larger collections. For example, libraries historically may have only kept a few copies of classic titles such as the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy in the adult fiction collection. Renewed interest created by recent film releases now means these books are circulating heavily from the adult, young adult, and children's collections in both cloth and paperback formats. They are to be found in the large print and Spanish language collections. The audio/visual collections in both adult and children's departments will have the book on cassette and CD, and the recent film releases on videocassette and DVD, as well as earlier animated film versions. It may be available as an electronic book to download on a home computer. And interest in the creation of the books and the films creates the demand for yet other book and film titles, websites and streaming video accessible on library computers, and subscription databases of fulltext articles.

All of these pressures to provide library resources are being placed on facilities that were sized to accommodate the population 20 or more years ago. Limited shelf space requires that for every book added, one must be removed. The result is that patrons are not finding the materials they need and want. In fact, over 90% of survey respondents to a December 2002 patron survey indicated that the collection needs to be improved. Forty percent requested improvements to the A/V collection. Over 50% requested improvements to the print collection. Focus group participants cited great difficulty in finding materials in the international languages, especially Spanish. With current space limitations, the Library is faced with an ‘either-or’ situation.

New Services Needed

In addition to serving a larger and more diverse population, libraries across the country are feeling a growing demand to provide new types of people-based services. Libraries are no longer only repositories for information of generations past. Modern libraries act as cultural centers, providing a place for the community to gather, learn, and discuss ideas together. This national trend towards a new generation of libraries is what library users are asking of the Sonoma County Library. At the Visioning Workshop in October 2002, the most common conclusion made was that a library should become a gathering place of people and ideas, drawing from other institutions in the county to offer multiple types of services. Respondents to the user survey also are looking for the Library to take on new ‘people-centric’ roles. When asked what new services should be added to their library, the top two responses were people spaces — a homework center and a computer training room.

While it may seem counter-intuitive, the growing use of technology has actually increased the space needs for library facilities. Electronic information has reduced the need to keep many bound periodicals or reference materials, but print materials are still in high demand. The new technology of digital information is augmenting the old technology of printed information, not replacing it. This trend will likely continue in the future, for even as technology tends to get smaller, the physical space needed for humans to interface with that technology will remain the same. While a desktop computer may shrink to a handheld unit, the space needed for a person to sit, view, and process information will likely remain the same.

Although the expansion of library facilities has not kept up with population growth, the Sonoma County Library has made improvements in operational efficiency to help meet some of the growing demand. The shift to a user-friendly on-line system has allowed patrons to access databases and perform searches from home, effectively increasing the number of computers in the system. The holds system, which allows patrons to order materials on-line from other branches to be delivered to their home library, expands the materials available beyond what is physically located within each community. The holds system is widely used, with over 5,000 requests being made in a single week. The Library has entered into agreements with other library systems that allow patrons to

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“If parents want their children to read in Spanish, they have to go elsewhere to find the books.”

Focus Group Participant



The growing use of technology has actually increased the space needs of libraries.

order materials from across the region. While these practices effectively increase the materials available to patrons, it is not adequate for time-sensitive activities or academic support where large number of students require the same materials at the same time. For those not using a home computer, the hold system requires two visits to the library to obtain the material.

Despite all these efforts, the space needs for the Library remain and will continue to grow. In addition to the lack of shelving space, there are only 222 computers available for a county population of 460,000 people. In the entire library system, only two acoustically controlled study spaces are available for tutoring, literacy training, or small group study.

Summary of the Need

The chart below quantifies this need by comparing resources currently available systemwide to recommended service levels. The recommendations are based on library industry guidelines from planning textbooks, publications of the American Library Association, and the professional experience of the master plan team. The guidelines have been tailored according to the specific conditions of each community in the county and the strengths of the current library system.

Each of the service categories listed below contributes to an overall composite measure of building size described in square feet per capita. This number is used as a shorthand measure of library service levels and is based on the number of people using a facility within both incorporated and unincorporated areas.

Service	Have			Need
	<i>number</i>	<i>per capita 2000</i>	<i>per capita 2025</i>	
Collection	720,506 vols.	1.57	1.19	2.4 to 2.5 vols. per capita
Public Seating	1,186 seats	2.59	1.96	3 to 4 seats per 1,000 people
Public Computers	222 comp.	2,006	2,730	1,000 to 1,250 persons per computer
Meeting Room	960 seats	74	74	50 to 150 seats per facility
Children’s Storytelling	25 seats	-	-	10 to 40 seats per facility
Group Study	12 seats	-	-	4 to 24 seats per facility
Building Size	198,569 sf	0.43	0.33	0.55 to 0.68 sf/capita

Facilities for Earlier Generations

The average library in Sonoma County is now 20 years old. The facilities were designed for a generation of library patrons that typically worked alone and in silence. Most, if not all, of the resources available were contained within the building, information was transmitted long distances via the teletype, and a parent was typically at home to greet children after school.

Libraries today need to support collective activities, from tutoring sessions to a group of students working on a class assignment. The current libraries were not designed to provide acoustically controlled spaces for such activities. The result of outdated facilities is the daily conflict between two legitimate user groups — those wanting to work in silence and those needing to work with others.

A product of outdated facilities is the daily conflict between those wanting to work in silence and those needing to work with others.

Advances in technology have placed greater demands on library facilities. Since 1968, when the Central and Northwest Santa Rosa Libraries were built, technological achievements have included humans walking on the moon, the microprocessor, the Boeing 747, personal computers, the Sony Walkman, the Internet, the artificial heart, videotape recorders, e-mail, compact discs, DVDs, teleconferencing, MP3 players, and fiber-optics. Many of the current facilities do not have the data and power infrastructure to support the number of electronic devices now used to gather, process, and store information.



Within the past 20 years there have also been significant changes to building codes that will need to be addressed in the current facilities. Structural codes have made seismic bracing requirements more stringent. Indoor air quality standards have risen. The Americans with Disabilities Act has set high standards for accessibility with which many libraries can only partially comply. Several facilities do not even have fire detection or suppression systems. As the facilities continue to age, significant effort will be required to simply keep them physically and technically sound.



The Recommendation: A New Generation of Public Libraries

The recommendations described here will produce a new generation of libraries that will offer improved traditional services and new people-centered and digital services throughout Sonoma County. These libraries will be information and cultural centers for the residents.



The recommendations include:

1. Create three new service areas to serve populations that currently do not have convenient access to libraries: Southwest Santa Rosa, Sea Ranch-Annapolis, and Bodega Bay.
2. Upgrade the two limited-service libraries at Occidental and Forestville to provide a broader range of services.
3. Expand and improve the Santa Rosa Central Library so it can effectively support the entire library system.
4. Expand and improve all present libraries by 2025 to meet the current and future needs of service areas countywide.

A few of the innovations that have emerged since the Northwest Santa Rosa Regional Library was built.

Summary of Countywide Recommendations

New service areas have been added to the system to serve areas that are currently unserved or severely underserved. New libraries in Southwest Santa Rosa, Bodega Bay, and Sea Ranch-Annapolis will not only bring service closer to residents of these areas, but also reduce the demands on other facilities such as Sebastopol, Guerneville, and the Santa Rosa Central Library.

Countywide, service level recommendations average between 0.58 and 0.61 square feet per capita. Service areas that are remote from other libraries are at the top of this range. Small branches have even higher needs per capita because of the minimum practical size of facility components. Libraries with special functions, such as the Wine Library in Healdsburg and the Sonoma County history and genealogy collections in Santa Rosa, have additional facility requirements to address their countywide roles. Facilities that work within a network of city libraries, such as those in Santa Rosa, are set lower, reflecting the existing pattern of patrons using multiple libraries.

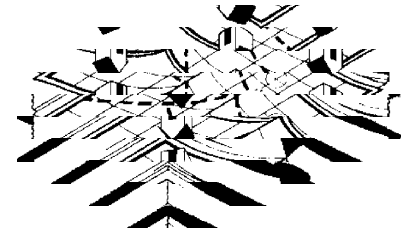
Summary of Recommendations by Branch

The chart below summarizes the recommendations by branch on a composite square foot per capita basis.

Service Area	Have				Need		
	2000 pop service area	2000 pop city sphere	building size	sf/cap	2025 pop service area	building size	2025 sf/cap
<i>Santa Rosa Central</i>	85,132	-	48,930	0.57	72,715	48,670 - 53,800	0.67 - 0.74
<i>Sonoma County History-Genealogy System Support</i>	-	-	4,000	-	-	9,400 - 15,130	
<i>System Support</i>	-	-	14,270	-	-	22,860 - 28,570	
Central Lib. Total	85,132	-	67,200	0.79	-	80,930 - 97,500	1.11 - 1.34
Santa Rosa Northwest	61,186	-	7,840	0.13	73,840	27,600 - 30,500	0.37 - 0.41
Santa Rosa Rincon Valley	34,998	-	15,000	0.43	48,532	19,300 - 21,300	0.40 - 0.44
Santa Rosa Southwest	-	-	-	-	60,681	23,350 - 25,800	0.38 - 0.43
<i>Santa Rosa Total</i>	181,316	147,595	90,040	0.50	255,768	151,180-175,100	0.59 - 0.68
Bodega Bay	-	-	-	-	2,231	3,750 - 4,130	1.68 - 1.85
Cloverdale	10,016	6,831	7,200	0.72	15,998	10,100 - 11,200	0.63 - 0.70
Forestville	4,263	-	660	0.15	5,519	4,570 - 5,050	0.83 - 0.92
Guerneville	13,259	-	6,237	0.47	18,349	11,000 - 12,130	0.60 - 0.66
<i>Healdsburg</i>	18,550	10,722	10,300	0.56	22,842	13,270 - 14,660	0.58 - 0.64
<i>Wine Library</i>	-	-	1,400	-	-	2,510 - 2,780	-
Healdsburg Total			11,700			15,780 - 17,440	0.69 - 0.76
Occidental	2,149	-	332	0.15	2,591	3,860 - 4,270	1.49 - 1.65
Petaluma	65,617	54,548	25,900	0.39	77,653	36,500 - 40,340	0.47 - 0.52
Rohnert Park-Cotati	54,654	48,707	25,000	0.46	73,463	33,460 - 36,980	0.46 - 0.50
Sea Ranch-Annapolis	-	-	-	-	3,794	4,340 - 4,800	1.14 - 1.26
Sebastopol	33,568	7,774	10,000	0.30	34,823	18,020 - 19,910	0.52 - 0.57
Sonoma Valley	40,400	9,128	10,000	0.25	51,262	27,650 - 30,560	0.54 - 0.60
Windsor	32,461	22,744	7,600	0.23	42,133	21,410 - 23,670	0.51 - 0.56
County Archives	-	-	3,900	-	-	8,000 - 15,000	-
System Total	458,613	308,049	198,569	0.43	606,426	337,430 - 386,280	0.56 - 0.64

Implementation: A Roadmap for the New Library

As the cost of building libraries requires a substantial capital expenditure, facility improvements are not likely to occur rapidly. Nonetheless, planning for the future is critical. Understanding the need and describing the vision for better libraries is essential for planning and building the public support needed for such a project. By defining the need, the Master Plan also positions communities to act quickly when unique opportunities arise.



The priority of needs is based on the following criteria:

1. **Reaching Unserved Areas**
Communities that do not have library service within their area are given the highest priority.
2. **Improving Underserved Areas**
Communities with limited library services in their area are given a higher priority than those with adequate services.
3. **Maximizing Impact**
Projects that would improve library service for a large number of people are given a higher priority.

A Flexible Plan

The actual sequence that facility improvements will follow is likely to differ as opportunities arise. Throughout the Master Plan process, the Library has discussed the recommended improvements for each library with elected officials of the respective communities. These conversations have made clear that some communities may be more ready to proceed with the recommended projects than others based on the financial context of each community. As such, the sequence of projects may not follow in the exact order of need. However, the need documented in the Master Plan is great enough and widespread enough that improvements in one community should not wait for the improvements in another.

Priority by Service Area

The priority of facility needs is based on the relative current need of each community as measured by the square foot of library per capita (sf/cap).



Group 1 **Current**

Service areas without libraries in the immediate area, and large communities with great current need (less than 0.3 sf/cap in 2000).

Bodega Bay	No service
Sea Ranch – Annapolis	No service
Santa Rosa Southwest	No service
Santa Rosa Northwest	0.13 sf/cap
Sebastopol	0.30 sf/cap
Sonoma Valley	0.25 sf/cap
Windsor	0.23 sf/cap

Group 2

Service areas with communities of any size with current need (0.4 sf/cap or less in 2000).

Upgrade smallest libraries to provide broadened services.

Improve system support.

Forestville	0.15 sf/cap
Occidental	0.15 sf/cap
Petaluma	0.39 sf/cap
Santa Rosa Central	Systemwide support

Group 3

Service areas with communities with future service needs (over 0.4 sf/cap in 2000).

Cloverdale	0.72 sf/cap
Guerneville	0.47 sf/cap
Healdsburg	0.56 sf/cap
Santa Rosa Rincon Valley	0.43 sf/cap
Rohnert Park-Cotati	0.46 sf/cap

Capital Funding: Past and Current Models

Since the Sonoma County Library Joint Powers Agency was created in 1975, 10 new facilities have been funded in a variety of ways. Some facilities, such as the Windsor Regional Library, were funded by the local community. The Guerneville Regional Library, located in unincorporated Sonoma County, was funded by the County. Other projects were funded through partnerships between several entities. Healdsburg, for example, was jointly funded by the City of Healdsburg, the County, and a federal grant. Rincon Valley was built with funds from the 1988 Library State Bond and the City of Santa Rosa. As funding for capital projects will be strained in the future, the need to leverage funds through partnerships will continue to be important.