



Strengthening the Community and Enriching Lives

Rochester Public Library (RPL) has an impressive 150 year history of responding to the needs of the community with resources, services, and programming, continually striving to fulfill its mission to *strengthen community and enrich lives by sparking imagination, creativity, engagement, and learning.*

The Library builds community by bringing individuals together to collaborate, create, innovate, and learn. RPL is an important community resource serving Rochester and the residents of Olmsted County, as well as being a welcoming place for the over two million annual visitors to Rochester, Minnesota, and the Mayo Clinic.

Over the past 20 years, RPL has seen an unprecedented increase in circulation, physical and digital materials collections, and program attendance. The Minnesota Public Library Annual Report shows RPL is the second busiest library building in Minnesota based on the number of materials borrowed and ranks first for the number of reference questions answered. In addition, RPL's bookmobile has the highest circulation in the state.

The Library's Role Today

In the last 20 years, libraries across the country have moved beyond primarily being repositories of books to actively supporting early literacy, providing computer and Internet access, offering classes and interactive experiences, connecting citizens with community resources, and serving as gathering places. Today's libraries continue to offer access to materials and answer complex reference questions, but have also adapted to current community needs for partnership and collaboration focused on building connections, knowledge and skills.

RPL is at the forefront of this evolution in libraries. As public libraries have transformed and refocused to provide engaging and enriching activities and create a sense of community, RPL has consistently responded to community-articulated needs. To complement its traditional services,

RPL is a leader in innovation with community collaborations such as the BookBike, a 2015 Local Government Innovation Award winner from The Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, which relied on strong collaborations for its success. Other recent examples include:



The **Wellness Corner**, a small room where community partners offer educational sessions and confidential information regarding physical and mental health issues, homeless resources, and workforce development.

The **MakerSpace**, an inclusive space for participants of all ages and skill levels to create, teach and learn about various art forms and writing styles often taught by talented community members.

Rochester Reading Champions, a literacy program built on strong partnerships, is focused on offering intensive training to volunteers who provide specialized, one-on-one, and free tutoring to underserved struggling adult and youth readers.

The Minnesota Children’s Museum **Smart Play Spot** offers a museum quality early literacy learning space for preschoolers.

The **Youth Services Art Room** allows children to create and display art, developing visual literacy skills as well as important fine motor skills.



A 10 seat **computer lab** with a 3D printer gives community members access to education and cutting edge technology.

Neighbors Read, a mini-library program, increases school readiness and reading proficiency. Through *Neighbors Read* and other mini-library programs, RPL now connects with over 115 little libraries placed in yards throughout the community to provide donated books for residents.

Collaborative art programs with area artists that provide unique, first-hand artist experiences such as the Artist in Residence Program, the Committee on Urban Design and Environment award-winning Garage Door Mural project with artist Peter Lex, and the 2015 Minnesota Pool of Dreams stained glass window installation with artist Stephanie Podulke.

The community’s response has been overwhelmingly positive to these new and innovative services and programs, resulting in an outpouring of support and an increase in collaborative opportunities and program attendance. RPL is eager to continue working with a diverse range of partners to further strengthen the community and enrich lives.

A Growing Problem

Although the demand for Library services has grown dramatically, the space in which to provide them has not. When the current RPL building at 101 2nd Street SE was constructed in 1994-1995, the intended size and scope of the project was scaled back due to funding limitations. The Library was reduced from three floors down to two with the expectation that the building would someday be expanded. Meanwhile, the current space prohibits further growth of the Library's services.

The remarkable growth of services provided by the Library from 1995 to 2014 is exhibited in this table:

	1995	2014	Increase
Materials Borrowed	1,070,714	1,638,503	53%
Books & Media	286,917	471,487	64%
Program Attendance	8,401	97,110	1,060%

In 2013 and 2014, the Library Board and Administrators reconfigured space to maximize public usage to better meet community needs. Library Administrators reassigned staff work areas for public space and developed make-shift spaces for materials; yet even with these new spaces, staff is prevented from meeting the demand for partnerships, engaging programs, and dynamic learning opportunities.

The space shortage results in many hindered opportunities and collaborations, just a few examples include:

- Adult, teen, and children's programs compete for space on a weekly basis requiring tough decisions about priorities. RPL creates worthwhile partnerships with organizations such as Rochester Public Schools, YMCA, Families First of MN, Winona State University, Mayo Clinic, Rochester Post-Bulletin, Diversity Council, and many more, but the Library is unable to always reach the full potential of these collaborations.
- The current RPL MakerSpace, when compared to MakerSpaces at peer libraries, grossly lacks size, technology, equipment and ongoing resources to allow for public innovation.
- The Minnesota Children's Museum *Smart Play Spot*, which sees more than 3,000 visitors a month, is too small to accommodate visiting classes of preschoolers, limiting the library experience for these young visitors.
- The TeenScape area is often overcrowded and the teen collection overflows available shelving.
- Homework Help, which is held four nights a week during the school year with support from volunteers and University of Minnesota, Rochester Work-Study students, meets in a room down a back hallway, far from the Youth Services collections and computers.

Thanks in large part to the designation of Rochester as a Destination Medical Center (DMC) and the exciting and responsive Journey to Growth (J2G) initiative, significant growth for Rochester and its surrounding communities has been forecasted. Additionally Rochester has been named by “Livability” as the number one city on the “Top 100 Places to Live”; Rochester is one of Minnesota’s fastest growing communities; and is number one on a list of mid-sized cities for women to find job opportunities.

The City of Rochester’s population is projected at 164,633 in 2040, an increase of 54 percent compared to the 2010 census. To meet the needs of this rapidly growing, diverse and innovative community, RPL must provide the space, the expanded collections and resources to respond appropriately to community needs.

To Better Serve the Community

To meet the needs of the community, it is necessary for the Library to expand and renovate. Over the last few years, leaders of RPL, its Board and Foundation, have explored a variety of options to determine requirements for the future and also to address the current facility’s issues. During a strategic planning process in 2012, RPL sought feedback from a community focus group to identify top needs and how the Library could best respond. In late 2015, the community focus group reconvened and reaffirmed the direction of the Library’s strategic plan.



From the strategic planning process three goals were clearly articulated:

- Goal 1. Grow Literacy and the Ability to use Library and Information Resources
- Goal 2. Engage the Community
- Goal 3. Build Infrastructure to Meet Community Needs

Amazing library services, educational programs, events, and materials are currently offered in the Library building, but a tipping point has been reached. There is no viable way to meet the demands of the community in the current space, and the expected growth in population only increases the problem. After much deliberation, Library leaders and administration determined that the most cost-effective solution to meet future needs is the addition of two floors and renovation of the existing two floors.

The three most important documents a free society gives are a birth certificate, a passport, and a library card—E.L. Doctorow

This, in turn, will allow the Library to reach community-directed strategic goals in a variety of ways including:

- A third floor dedicated to children and teens expands engagement and innovation for all youth, and demonstrates Rochester’s commitment to the future.
- Multiple flexible and dynamic programming spaces to increase opportunities for partnerships and collaborations such as public forums for key issues, hands-on learning activities, engaging social discussions, and innovative trainings.
- Improved access to the building and outside book drop addresses safety and usability issues.
- Dedicated technology learning areas increases educational growth around new technologies for people of all ages.
- An intentional layout creates space sensitive to the needs of a variety of populations, such as preschoolers and special needs youth and adults, and also balances the needs of those who require loud interactive spaces and those who seek quiet study and retreat.
- Expanded space provides cultural and intergenerational connections and special exhibitions such as the RACE Exhibit.
- Comfortable and user-friendly areas for all to engage, enjoy, and learn.
- Increased creative space encourages progressive thinking and provides learning opportunities for all ages.



Rochester and Olmsted County are poised for extraordinary development, and the Library is a pivotal organization in the community’s infrastructure. The Library’s long-overdue expansion is a critical component for retention of talented workers, development of innovative businesses, and



prosperity of its citizens. With more than half a million people visiting the Library annually, expansion is essential for RPL to continue to be an integral part of a vibrant and thriving downtown.

Books are friends that never fail.
--Dr. William J. Mayo

Funding the Vision

The estimated cost of the proposed RPL expansion and renovation project is \$55 million, including planning and construction costs, furnishings and equipment. Funding for the project will potentially come from a variety of sources, including the City of Rochester, Olmsted County, the Destination Medical Center initiative, and philanthropic gifts from foundations, corporations and individuals.

Now is the time to realize the completion of the community’s vision for the Library. RPL is a cornerstone of this community and has been for 150 years. Expansion and renovation are necessary to meet current demands for Library services and to be ready for the opportunities and challenges of the future.



Where aspirations, ideas and knowledge converge—Vision Statement, Rochester Public Library