

OAK PARK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Board Meeting: Outreach Results



A photograph of a modern building at night, featuring large glass windows that reveal interior spaces with bookshelves and warm lighting. The building has a dark, angular facade. To the left, there are silhouettes of trees and a street lamp. The sky is a deep blue.

what is a strategic facilities plan

WHAT IS A STRATEGIC FACILITIES PLAN?

A strategic, long-range planning document that outlines how the library's physical environment should evolve to support its mission, users, collections, technology, and community over time. It serves as a roadmap for both current design decisions and future expansion or renovation.



1 VISIONING

Visioning is the first step in creating a strategic facilities plan.

This is a collaborative process where community members, library staff, and project partners come together to imagine the library's future. Through this work, we identify the library's goals, the role it should play in the community, and the kind of experiences we want it to offer.

The visioning process helps everyone build a shared understanding of what the library can become and how it can best serve the community for years to come.

2 PROGRAMMING

Programming is the part of the strategic facilities planning process where we turn the community's vision into a list of the spaces the library needs.

In this phase, we identify what activities the library should support, what kinds of rooms and areas are required, how big they should be, and how they should connect. Programming helps us understand how the library will function day-to-day so that the final design truly supports the people who use it.

3 CONCEPT PLANNING

The concept design phase explores ideas for how the library could look and function. It translates the program into big-picture layout options and shows how major spaces could be arranged and connected.

It is not a final design, but a roadmap that helps the community visualize possibilities and compare alternatives before committing to one path.



4 COST ESTIMATE

The cost estimate phase is when the project team develops an early projection of what it will cost to renovate the library based on the emerging design concepts and space needs.

These estimates help the library and community understand the financial scale of the project and make informed decisions before final design begins.

5 FINAL REPORT

The final report is the comprehensive document that brings together all findings, recommendations, and decisions made throughout the planning process.

It serves as the roadmap for how the library will evolve outlining the vision, space needs, design concepts, cost estimates, and steps for moving the project forward.

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1. Visioning

- a. Survey Outreach
- b. Focus Group Surveys
- c. Department Meetings
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SURVEY OUTREACH

Community and stakeholder engagement are a cornerstone of the Strategic Facilities Plan process. To develop a vision that reflects the needs, priorities, and aspirations of those served by the organization, input was gathered through surveys distributed to staff, board members, and the broader community.

This multi-faceted outreach effort provided valuable insight into current conditions, future opportunities, and shared priorities for growth and investment. The resulting insights directly informed the Strategic Facilities Plan vision, goals, and recommendations, ensuring the final plan reflects a balanced perspective and a shared path forward for the library and the community it serves.

BOARD SURVEYS

Board members were invited to participate in a survey distributed electronically through a Google Form. The survey remained available for three weeks, providing leadership with the opportunity to share their perspectives on the library's mission, long-term goals, and future direction. Responses helped identify strategic priorities, opportunities for growth, and key considerations for future investments.

This input was instrumental in ensuring that the Master Plan aligns with the Board's vision, supports library objectives, and provides a framework for informed decision-making in the years ahead.



STAFF SURVEYS

Staff members were invited to participate in a survey distributed to all employees through a Google Form, which remained open for a three-week period. The survey gathered firsthand perspectives on day-to-day operations, the functionality of existing facilities, program needs, and opportunities for improvement. Staff feedback helped identify operational challenges, space requirements, and priorities that support organizational effectiveness and the delivery of services.

Staff insights provided an important foundation for understanding current needs and shaping future

COMMUNITY SURVEYS

Community members and stakeholders were invited to share their experiences, needs, and expectations for the future through a comprehensive community survey process. The survey was promoted through the Village newsletter and Library newsletters to maximize awareness and participation. A digital survey, administered through OrangeBoy, was available for a six-week period, providing residents with a convenient opportunity to share their feedback. To ensure broad accessibility, paper copies of the survey were also made available at all library locations and service desks throughout the survey period.

The outreach effort generated an exceptional level of community engagement, resulting in 1,650 responses. The feedback provided valuable insight into community perceptions, desired amenities, service priorities, and opportunities to enhance programs, services, and facilities. The strong participation rate reflects the community's interest in the future of the Library and helped ensure that the Strategic Facilities Plan is informed by a broad and diverse range of voices reflective of the community of Oak Park.

BOARD SURVEY RESULTS

Board feedback emphasized improving how the library functions as a flexible, community-centered space. Top priorities include expanding meeting, study and community spaces, creating more comfortable, well-lit seating areas, and ensuring the building better supports how people gather, work, and collaborate throughout the day.

Board members also highlighted the need for dedicated youth and teen areas, stronger staff workspaces, and upgraded amenities such as restrooms and wellness features. Overall, the message is that the library is highly valued, but its spaces need to work harder to support flexibility, comfort, and access to services and strengthen its role as a welcoming community hub.

BOARD'S TOP WAYS TO IMPROVE THE LIBRARY



RESPONSES FROM THE BOARD



I envision Oak Park Public Library as an inviting free third space for everyone that embraces belonging without othering.

I know we need to find a way to allow our architecture be welcoming when it needs to be welcoming and a barrier when we need it to be one.

I'm interested in how we can achieve this.

I love that the teens feel comfortable here, and I want that to be a priority. I also want it to be where people think of us first when they need anything.

STAFF SURVEY RESULTS

Staff feedback focused on improving how the existing library functions to support strong public service. Top priorities include better staff workrooms and storage, reliable access to power and charging, and additional small group meeting rooms to address consistent heavy demand.

Staff also emphasized the need for safe, well-designed service points and an inviting, accessible environment. Overall, the message is that targeted investments in functionality, staff support, and accessibility will directly strengthen service quality and community impact. Staff are not asking for more space - they are asking for the building to function better.

STAFF'S TOP WAYS TO IMPROVE THE LIBRARY



RESPONSES FROM STAFF

Outlets are a huge issue especially up on the third floor and in the silent reading room.

A warm, inviting space where everyone feels welcomed, and everyone has a space or resources that suit their needs.

When I close my eyes I still see our library but with better use of the spaces we currently have.

We need more office space. We also need a second staff only meeting room, for small groups of 4 or less.



COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS - TOP FUTURE PRIORITIES

Survey responses demonstrate that the community highly values the Library's role as a welcoming destination for reading, learning, discovery, and community connection. Residents expressed strong support for maintaining the Library's core strengths—including collections, children's services, and quiet spaces—while also improving the flexibility, comfort, and functionality of the building. Respondents consistently identified the importance of spaces that are inviting, easy to use, and able to accommodate a variety of activities, from individual study and reading to group collaboration and community programming.

66%

INVITING ATMOSPHERE (962 respondents)

Creating a welcoming and comfortable environment was the highest-ranked priority. Respondents want the Library to feel accessible, attractive, and inviting for all users, reinforcing its role as a community destination and gathering place.

54%

QUIET AREAS FOR READING & STUDY (799 respondents)

Residents highly value the Library as a place for focused work, reading, studying, and reflection. The strong support for quiet areas demonstrates the continued importance of providing spaces that foster concentration and individual use.

42%

BROWSING & DISCOVERING COLLECTIONS (611 respondents)

Respondents emphasized the importance of spaces that support browsing books, audiovisual materials, and other collections. Easy access to materials and opportunities for discovery remain central to the Library experience.

35%

COMFORTABLE SEATING & WELCOMING SPACES (513 respondents)

A variety of seating options was identified as an important priority, reflecting the community's desire for comfortable spaces that support reading, studying, socializing, and extended visits.

34%

CHILDREN'S SERVICES & FAMILY SPACES (506 respondents)

Dedicated spaces for children and families remain a key priority. Respondents expressed strong support for interactive, age-appropriate environments that encourage learning, exploration, and family engagement.

31%

CONVENIENT LIBRARY SERVICES & COLLECTION ACCESS (462 respondents)

Many respondents prioritized easy access to service points, self-checkout facilities, staff assistance, and a large collection of books and materials. These responses highlight the importance of maintaining efficient services while preserving the Library's traditional strengths.

25%

FLEXIBLE LEARNING & COMMUNITY SPACES (360 respondents)

Respondents showed strong support for makerspaces, small-group meeting rooms, and flexible spaces that support collaboration, creativity, lifelong learning, and community activities. These amenities reflect the Library's expanding role beyond traditional collections and reading spaces.



COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS - TOP EXISTING CHALLENGES

The survey identified several challenges with the existing facility. Parking, noise levels, and limitations in meeting and gathering spaces were among the most commonly cited concerns. Together, these findings suggest that future investments should focus on enhancing the overall user experience, improving access and convenience, and providing flexible spaces that support the evolving needs of the community while preserving the services residents value most.

44%

PARKING & SITE ACCESS (485 respondents)
Parking was the most frequently identified challenge in the survey. Respondents cited concerns related to parking availability, convenience, and accessibility, particularly during busy periods and special events. Improving site access is a significant opportunity to enhance the overall user experience.

24%

NOISE LEVELS (265 respondents)
Many respondents indicated that noise can interfere with reading, studying, and other activities. This finding aligns with the strong desire for additional quiet spaces and suggests a need for better separation between active and quiet areas within the building.

12%

LIMITED MEETING & GATHERING SPACES (134 respondents)
Respondents expressed a need for additional meeting rooms and flexible gathering spaces. Demand for spaces that accommodate collaboration, programs, and community events appears to exceed the capacity of the existing facility.

The survey findings suggest that future investments should prioritize inviting and quiet spaces, strong collections, children’s services, and flexible community spaces, while also addressing parking, noise, meeting-space capacity, and accessibility challenges within the existing facility.

9%

WAYFINDING & ACCESS TO COLLECTIONS (104 respondents)
Some users reported challenges navigating the building or locating materials and services. These responses suggest opportunities to improve wayfinding, visibility, and overall organization within the facility.

9%

LIMITED ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY SERVICES (103 respondents)
Respondents identified a need for improved access to printers, copiers, computers, and other technology resources. Enhancing technology access can help support both everyday users and evolving community needs.

5%

ACCESSIBILITY BARRIERS (51 respondents)
A smaller but important group of respondents noted challenges related to accessibility, including furniture, technology, and building layout. Addressing these concerns will help ensure that Library spaces remain inclusive and accessible to all users.



Books and reading should remain at the heart of the library experience

Comfortable seating and inviting spaces are important reasons people visit the library.

Security should be balanced with maintaining an open and inviting atmosphere.

Family-focused programs and learning opportunities should continue to grow

Access to technology, devices, and digital learning opportunities will remain important

Design decisions should consider mobility, inclusion, and equitable access

The library serves as a community gathering place and should continue to support that role.

Environmental stewardship should be a priority in future improvements



COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS - "OTHER" RESPONSES

To better understand community priorities, all written comments from the survey were reviewed and organized into common themes. This analysis included responses to open-ended questions about future needs, additional feedback, and all "other" comment fields. Responses to multiple-choice questions were not included so that the results would reflect what community members chose to write in their own words.

A total of 1,161 respondents provided at least one written comment. Each respondent was counted only once within a theme, even if they mentioned that topic multiple times. Because many respondents discussed more than one issue, a single comment could be counted under multiple themes. As a result, the total number of theme mentions is greater than the number of respondents who provided comments.

This approach helps identify the topics that were most frequently raised in residents' own words and provides a clear picture of the community priorities expressed through the survey.

54%

TECHNOLOGY, DIGITAL EQUITY, & REMOTE WORK (630 respondents) was the most frequently mentioned theme. Respondents emphasized the need for reliable technology infrastructure, access to computers and high-speed internet, digital literacy training, flexible workspaces, and resources that support evolving technology needs, including remote work and emerging digital tools.

28%

BOOKS, COLLECTIONS, & LITERACY SERVICES (330 respondents) remained a significant priority. Respondents expressed strong support for maintaining robust physical and digital collections, promoting reading and literacy, and ensuring continued access to a wide variety of library materials and educational resources.

25%

COMMUNITY GATHERING (293 respondents) was another commonly discussed theme. Many respondents described the Library as an important community hub and highlighted the value of educational programs, classes, workshops, cultural events, and opportunities for learning and social connection.

21%

CHILDREN, TEENS & FAMILY SERVICES (242 respondents) were frequently identified as important community needs. Respondents expressed support for dedicated spaces, educational opportunities, and programming that serve children, teens, caregivers, and multigenerational families.

18%

SUSTAINABILITY & ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY (214 respondents) emerged as a notable theme. Comments reflected interest in environmentally responsible building design, energy efficiency, sustainable operations, and ensuring that the Library remains resilient and adaptable to future environmental challenges.

13%

CREATIVE SPACES & MAKERSPACES (152 respondents) were also mentioned by many respondents. Community members expressed interest in spaces that support creativity, hands-on learning, digital media production, arts programming, and emerging maker technologies.

13%

SAFETY & SECURITY (151 respondents) was identified as an important consideration for the Library. Respondents emphasized the need to maintain a welcoming environment while ensuring that all visitors feel safe and comfortable using Library facilities.

12%

QUIET & COMFORTABLE SPACES (147 respondents) were frequently mentioned as valued features of the Library experience. Respondents expressed a desire for comfortable seating, quiet reading areas, study spaces, and environments that support concentration, reflection, and relaxation.

12%

MEETING & STUDY SPACES (142 respondents) were identified as an ongoing community need. Many respondents requested additional reservable meeting rooms, collaborative work areas, and flexible spaces that can accommodate both individual and group activities.

9%

PARKING & ACCESSIBILITY (101 respondents) were recurring topics in community feedback. Respondents noted the importance of convenient parking, accessible building features, and design elements that ensure all community members can comfortably access and use Library services.

Together, these comments demonstrate a desire to preserve the Library's traditional strengths while expanding its capacity to serve as a flexible, technology-rich, inclusive, and community-centered destination for future generations.

1. Visioning

- a. Survey Outreach
- b. Focus Group Surveys
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FOCUS GROUP ENGAGEMENT SURVEYS

In addition to the community-wide survey, the Library conducted targeted focus group surveys to better understand the needs and perspectives of specific user groups. These focused conversations provided valuable insight into how different populations use the Library, what spaces they value most, and how the Library can continue to evolve to meet community needs. While each group had unique interests and priorities, several common themes emerged, including the importance of welcoming spaces, opportunities for community connection, access to technology, and maintaining the Library as an inclusive and accessible resource for all residents.

MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

This focus group was designed to gather feedback from middle school and high school students who use the Library for studying, socializing, programs, and independent activities. The group provided insight into how teens use Library spaces, what amenities help support their educational and social needs, and what improvements could make the Library a more welcoming destination for young people.

OLDER ADULTS

This focus group targeted older adult community members, primarily adults age 65 and older, to better understand their experiences, priorities, and future needs. Participants discussed topics such as collections, lifelong learning opportunities, accessibility, technology support, comfort, meeting spaces, and services that help older adults remain active and connected within the community.



STORYTIME & CAREGIVER FOCUS GROUP

This focus group targeted parents, caregivers, and families who regularly participate in Storytime and other early childhood programs at the Library. Participants shared perspectives on children's spaces, family-friendly amenities, programming, collections, and services that support early literacy, learning, and family engagement.

SUPPORTED FAMILIES FOCUS GROUP

This focus group was designed to engage families and individuals who have experience with disabilities, accessibility needs, sensory sensitivities, mobility challenges, or other support needs. The discussion focused on creating more inclusive and accessible Library environments, improving accommodations, enhancing wayfinding and universal design, and ensuring the Library remains welcoming and usable for people of all abilities and backgrounds.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE CONVERSATION PARTICIPANTS

This focus group engaged participants in the Library's English Language Conversation program, which serves adults working to strengthen their English language skills and build community connections. The group provided feedback on how Library spaces support learning, social interaction, accessibility, cultural inclusion, and lifelong education for residents from diverse backgrounds.

The priorities listed on the following pages reflect the strongest themes that emerged across all survey questions, including future space priorities, current building assets & challenges, library use patterns, and open ended feedback.

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY RESULTS - MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL

A total of **32 participants** responded to the survey, including **21 complete responses and 11 partial responses**, providing valuable insight into how younger community members use the library today and what they would like to see in the future. Middle and high school **participants envision a library that supports both academic success and social engagement**. Their feedback highlights the need for dedicated teen-focused spaces, flexible environments for collaboration and study, welcoming amenities, and technology infrastructure that reflects the expectations of today's students.

77%

DEDICATED TEEN SPACE (17 respondents)

The highest-ranked priority was a dedicated space designed specifically for teens. Respondents expressed a desire for an environment where they can study, socialize, participate in programs, and feel a sense of ownership and belonging within the library.

54%

SOCIAL SPACES FOR TALKING & GROUP INTERACTION (12 respondents)

Students value spaces where they can gather with friends, collaborate on school projects, and participate in informal social activities.

45%

FOOD & DRINK AREA WITH SEATING (10 respondents)

A café-style area was identified as an important amenity that would encourage longer visits and provide a comfortable space for studying, relaxing, and meeting with friends.

41%

INVITING ATMOSPHERE (9 respondents)

Respondents emphasized the importance of a library environment that feels welcoming, comfortable, and visually appealing.

41%

QUIET STUDY & READING AREAS (9 respondents)

Although social spaces were a major priority, respondents also indicated a strong need for quieter areas that support focused study, homework, reading, and test preparation. Quiet zones were also among the most valued features of the current library building.

36%

PLACES TO PLUG IN / CHARGE DEVICES (8 respondents)

Access to power and charging stations was identified as an important amenity for today's students.

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY RESULTS - OLDER ADULTS

A total of **20 respondents** completed the survey, achieving a **100% completion rate**. The Older Adults Focus Group expressed a strong preference for a library that is **welcoming, easy to navigate, and centered on lifelong learning and community connection**. Their priorities emphasize comfortable gathering spaces, accessible services, cultural enrichment opportunities, and areas that support ongoing learning and engagement.

75%

CENTRAL LOCATION (15 respondents)

The library's central location was identified as the most valued feature of the current facility. Convenient access makes it easier for older adults to attend programs, access services, and remain connected to community activities.

60%

INVITING ATMOSPHERE (12 respondents)

Respondents placed significant importance on a welcoming, comfortable, and attractive environment.

45%

NATURAL LIGHT (9 respondents)

Natural light was one of the most appreciated aspects of the building. Bright, open spaces contribute to comfort, wellness, visibility, and an overall positive user experience.

40%

MEETING & PROGRAM SPACES (8 respondents)

Older adults value spaces that accommodate educational programs, lectures, cultural events, discussion groups, and community gatherings. Flexible meeting spaces support lifelong learning and social engagement.

40%

ACCESSIBLE SERVICE & SUPPORT POINTS (8 respondents)

Easy access to service desks, staff assistance, and self-service options was identified as an important priority. Respondents value a library that is easy to navigate and provides readily available support when needed.

30%

QUIET & COMFORTABLE SPACES (6 respondents)

Quiet areas remain important for reading, reflection, study, and relaxation. Respondents indicated a desire for spaces that provide a calm and comfortable environment away from busier areas of the library.

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY RESULTS - STORYTIME / CAREGIVERS

A total of **8 respondents** participated in the survey, including **6 complete responses and 2 partial responses**, resulting in a **75% completion rate**. The Storytime and Caregiver Focus Group envisions a library that serves as a **family-centered destination for learning, discovery, and growth**. Participants prioritized engaging spaces for young children, access to collections, welcoming environments, and opportunities for hands-on learning. Their feedback reflects a desire for a library that supports children at every stage of development while providing caregivers with comfortable, enriching spaces that foster family engagement and lifelong learning.

100%

INTERACTIVE CHILDREN'S AREA (6 respondents)

Respondents overwhelmingly prioritized dedicated spaces where children can learn, play, explore, and engage with library resources. This was the strongest finding in the survey and reinforces the importance of supporting early literacy and childhood development through interactive experiences.

100%

AGE-SPECIFIC SPACES (6 respondents)

Participants identified age-specific areas as the most valuable aspect of the current library building.

67%

BROWSING AREA FOR POPULAR MATERIALS (4 respondents)

Easy access to popular books and materials supports discovery and family reading. Caregivers appreciate being able to quickly locate recommended titles, new releases, and children's materials during visits.

67%

NATURAL LIGHT (4 respondents)

Natural light was identified as one of the most valued building features. Bright, open spaces contribute to a comfortable and welcoming environment for both children and caregivers.

67%

CENTRAL LOCATION (4 respondents)

Convenient access to the library is important for families who regularly attend Storytime and children's programs.

50%

FAMILY FRIENDLY & INVITING ATMOSPHERE (3 respondents)

Caregivers emphasized the importance of a welcoming environment where families feel comfortable spending time together.

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY RESULTS - SUPPORTED FAMILIES

A total of **23 participants** responded to the survey, including **16 complete responses and 7 partial responses**, resulting in a **69.6% completion rate**. The Supported Families Focus Group envisions a library that is **inclusive, accessible, and adaptable to diverse community needs**. Participants prioritized welcoming environments, quiet spaces, comfortable and flexible seating, accessible amenities, and opportunities for learning and engagement. Feedback throughout the survey consistently emphasized the importance of designing beyond minimum accessibility standards to create a library that supports people of all abilities, ages, and backgrounds.

71%

INVITING ATMOSPHERE (12 respondents)

Participants identified a welcoming and comfortable environment as their highest priority.

65%

MEETING & GATHERING SPACES (11 respondents)

Meeting spaces were identified as one of the most valuable aspects of the current library. Respondents value flexible spaces that support programs, support services, community gatherings, collaboration, and social connection.

59%

QUIET AREAS (10 respondents)

Quiet spaces were consistently identified as important for concentration, remote work, reading, sensory regulation, and personal comfort.

59%

VARIETY OF SEATING OPTIONS (10 respondents)

Participants emphasized the need for seating that accommodates different abilities, ages, body types, and mobility requirements.

59%

ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSIVE DESIGN (10 respondents)

A recurring theme throughout the survey was the importance of going beyond minimum accessibility standards. Respondents highlighted automatic doors, accessible technology, sensory-friendly environments, varied furniture options, improved wayfinding, and accommodations for individuals with disabilities and an aging population.

41%

CHILDREN'S & FAMILY SPACES (7 respondents)

Age-specific and interactive spaces for children were viewed as important community assets. Respondents emphasized the value of environments that support learning, exploration, family engagement, and development for children of all abilities.

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY RESULTS - ENGLISH LANGUAGE

A total of **16 participants** responded to the survey, including **13 complete responses and 3 partial responses**, resulting in an **81.3% completion rate**. The English Language Conversation Focus Group envisions a library that serves as a **welcoming center for learning, connection, and community integration**. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of meeting spaces, opportunities for conversation and collaboration, accessible facilities, and environments that support language learning and lifelong education. The findings suggest that future library investments should strengthen the library's role as a community gathering place where people of diverse backgrounds can learn, connect, and thrive.

75%

MEETING & GATHERING SPACES (9 respondents)

Meeting spaces were identified as the most valuable feature of the current library. Participants rely on these spaces for language learning, conversation practice, educational programs, and community-building activities.

58%

CENTRAL LOCATION & ACCESSIBILITY (7 respondents)

The library's central location was highly valued because it allows easy access to services, programs, and community resources.

46%

QUIET AREAS FOR STUDY & CONVERSATION (6 respondents)

Quiet spaces were a leading priority for participants. These environments support language learning, tutoring, reading, studying, remote work, and focused conversations with minimal distractions.

46%

SOCIAL SPACES & SMALL GROUP MEETING ROOMS (6 respondents)

Respondents value spaces where people can practice English, connect with others, participate in discussion groups, and build community relationships.

38%

INVITING ATMOSPHERE (5 respondents)

A welcoming environment was identified as an important factor in creating a positive library experience. Participants expressed appreciation for spaces that feel comfortable, inclusive, and supportive of diverse backgrounds and cultures.

31%

FLEXIBLE LEARNING SPACES (4 respondents)

Respondents highlighted the importance of spaces that support learning, digital equity, remote work, accessibility needs, and lifelong education.

The community is not asking for a significantly larger library.

It is asking for a more accessible, comfortable, flexible, technology-ready, family-friendly library that preserves books and learning while better supporting quiet work, community connection, and changing user needs.

1. Visioning

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DEPARTMENT MEETINGS

As part of the Main Library Strategic Facilities Plan process, Woolpert Architects conducted a series of department-based engagement sessions with Oak Park Public Library staff. These meetings were designed to gather firsthand insight into how the building currently supports library services, where challenges exist, and how future facility improvements could better align with evolving community and operational needs.

The engagement process consisted of individual meetings with library departments that took place over several days. Each session lasted approximately one to two hours and included a combination of facilitated discussion, library trends exercises, and on-site space assessments. Staff from all service areas—including public service departments, technical services, administration, facilities, communications, and support functions—participated in these sessions.

During the meetings, architects presented current trends in public library design and service delivery. Discussions explored how libraries are responding to changing community expectations through increased flexibility, expanded technology access, enhanced youth spaces, remote work accommodations, makerspaces, accessibility improvements, and evolving community gathering needs. Staff were asked to react to these trends and identify which concepts would be most relevant and beneficial for Oak Park Public Library.

The conversations also focused on department-specific priorities and operational needs. Staff discussed how public spaces are currently used, where demand exceeds available space, and what improvements would better support patrons. Common topics included quiet study environments, meeting rooms, technology access, children's and teen spaces, collection visibility, wayfinding, accessibility, flexible programming space, and opportunities to improve the overall user experience.

In addition to public-facing needs, each department discussed challenges and opportunities within staff work areas. Topics included staff collaboration, office and workstation needs, storage capacity, workflow efficiency, meeting spaces, wellness and break areas, staff safety, technology infrastructure, and the ability of staff spaces to support future growth and changing responsibilities. Staff were encouraged to identify both immediate operational challenges and long-term facility needs.

Following the discussions, architects conducted walkthroughs of department work areas and public service spaces with staff members. These tours allowed architects to observe daily operations firsthand, understand departmental workflows, identify constraints within existing spaces, and better evaluate how services are delivered within the building. Staff were able to point out specific strengths, challenges, and opportunities within their work environments and public service areas.

The department meetings and building walkthroughs provided valuable operational perspectives that complement community survey results, focus groups, staff and board feedback, and broader library trends research. Collectively, the sessions helped identify opportunities to improve flexibility, accessibility, user experience, staff effectiveness, and the overall long-term functionality of the Main Library building.



STAFF'S VISION FOR THE FUTURE LIBRARY

Staff consistently called for a more flexible, accessible, and user-focused library that better supports learning, community connection, evolving services, and efficient use of space.

The department meetings revealed a remarkable level of consistency across staff groups. While most participants did not advocate for a dramatically larger building, they repeatedly **emphasized the need to use existing space more intentionally and strategically**. Staff expressed a desire for a more flexible, accessible, welcoming, and technology-enabled library that better supports collections, learning, community connection, staff effectiveness, and evolving patron needs. Collectively, the meetings reinforce the vision of the library as a vibrant community hub that balances quiet study, active collaboration, lifelong learning, creativity, and inclusion while supporting efficient operations and long-term adaptability.

1 REIMAGINE THE LOBBY AS AN ACTIVE COMMUNITY HUB

The lobby was the most frequently discussed public space in the building. Staff across multiple departments described it as oversized, underutilized, difficult to navigate, and lacking a clear purpose. Participants envisioned a more active and welcoming space that supports community gathering, business services, visible collections, exhibits, comfortable seating, self-service functions, and social interaction. Many departments also identified opportunities to improve the location and function of the public service desk, community space, Idea Box, and marketplace-style browsing areas.

2 EXPAND QUIET STUDY, COLLABORATION, & REMOTE WORK SPACES

The need for additional study rooms was one of the strongest and most consistent findings. Nearly every department reported high demand for study rooms, tutoring spaces, teleconferencing rooms, private work areas, and quiet reading environments. Staff repeatedly noted that existing rooms are heavily utilized, often by only one or two people, and that smaller rooms, phone booths, and remote-work spaces would better meet current patron needs. Quiet space needs were identified for students, adults, remote workers, and library users seeking focused work environments.

3 STRENGTHEN CHILDRENS, TWEEN, & TEEN ENVIRONMENTS

Staff consistently emphasized the importance of creating more intentional and age-appropriate youth spaces. Children's Services identified needs for additional programming space, gross motor play areas, sensory-friendly environments, and dedicated spaces for older children. Middle and High School Services emphasized the need for enclosed but visible teen areas that support studying, gaming, mentorship, creativity, and social interaction while minimizing conflicts with adjacent spaces. Several departments recommended improved separation between children, tweens, and teens to better support their distinct needs.

STAFF'S VISION FOR THE FUTURE LIBRARY

4 IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Accessibility concerns appeared throughout the meetings. Staff identified challenges with non-automatic doors, inaccessible study rooms, emergency exits, restrooms, stairways, and overall ease of movement throughout the building. Many departments advocated for a more universally designed and neuro-inclusive facility that better supports patrons of all abilities and ages. Sensory-friendly spaces, accessible furnishings, improved visibility, and clearer wayfinding were repeatedly discussed.

5 ENHANCE COLLECTIONS VISIBILITY, BROWSABILITY, & DISCOVERY

Many departments expressed concern that collections have become fragmented and harder to browse over time. Staff frequently suggested lower shelving, increased face-out displays, improved signage, bookstore-inspired layouts, and more intuitive organization. Collections Services, Adult Services, Patron Services, and Special Collections all emphasized the importance of making collections more visible and discoverable while maintaining flexibility for future growth and changing formats.

6 EXPAND TECHNOLOGY & DIGITAL SERVICES

Technology-related needs were discussed by nearly every department. Staff identified ongoing demand for public computing, charging infrastructure, digital signage, business center services, teleconferencing spaces, media production rooms, makerspaces, and technology-enabled meeting spaces. The need for additional power outlets throughout the building was one of the most common facility-related comments. Several departments also emphasized the growing importance of remote work support and digital content creation.

7 IMPROVE DESK FUNCTIONALITY, SIGHTLINES, & SAFETY

Service desk design emerged as a major operational concern. Staff across multiple departments reported inadequate sightlines, challenges monitoring public areas, and concerns about patrons entering staff work zones from behind service desks. Improved visibility, better adjacencies to workrooms, safer configurations, and more functional layouts were recurring recommendations. Maintaining visual oversight while preserving a welcoming atmosphere was repeatedly identified as a priority.

8 INVEST IN STAFF WORKSPACES, WELLNESS, & OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

Staff consistently expressed a need for better work environments. Common themes included additional meeting rooms, improved workrooms, better storage, wellness spaces, private phone rooms, lockers, staff break space, and opportunities for future growth. Many departments also requested outdoor staff spaces, rooftop access, and more flexible work environments that support collaboration while providing privacy when needed.

9 UPGRADE BUILDING SYSTEMS & INFRASTRUCTURE

Beyond programmatic needs, staff identified numerous facility-related issues. Common concerns included inconsistent HVAC performance, inadequate acoustics, limited power access, aging finishes, elevator capacity, loading and storage challenges, lighting quality, and building maintenance needs. Several departments also emphasized sustainability improvements, energy efficiency, bird-strike mitigation, and long-term stewardship of the facility.

10 ACTIVATE OUTDOOR & GREEN SPACES

Interest in outdoor spaces appeared across many departments. Staff discussed outdoor reading areas, storytime spaces, gardens, pollinator habitats, rooftop access, staff wellness spaces, and greater use of the plaza and surrounding landscape. Many viewed outdoor environments as opportunities to expand programming, improve community gathering spaces, and strengthen the library's connection to Scoville Park and the surrounding community.

“ We want a space that is accessible and flexible so that it can continue to adapt with how our community uses the library. ”

LIBRARY TRENDS RESULTS

Library staff were presented with a range of current library trends across four categories—Adult Services, Children’s Services, Middle & High School Services, and Community Spaces—and were asked to indicate their priorities by placing stickers on the trends they felt were most important to the library’s future.

Staff see today’s libraries as places that need to balance quiet, focused activities with technology and opportunities for creativity. The most important trends identified for **Adult Services** were quiet reading and focus spaces, access to public computers and technology, and social environments where people can gather and connect. Staff also highlighted high interest in creative spaces such as the art gallery, makerspaces, digital creation areas, and recording studios. Overall, they view libraries as places that support both traditional reading and learning while also giving people access to tools and spaces for creating and sharing new ideas.

For children and teen areas, staff emphasized the importance of flexible, engaging environments that support learning, play, and exploration. For **Children’s Services**, top priorities included sensory-friendly spaces, dedicated play areas, and flexible programming rooms. STEAM and maker activities, tutoring spaces, and clear zoning for defined activities followed closely behind. But, access to technology and a dedicated 4th & 5th grade zone were low priorities. For **Middle & High School Services**, staff placed the greatest importance on flexible spaces that can adapt to different activities, along with gaming areas, and teen collections. Collaboration zones and focus on clear branding and identity did not emerge as top priorities. Here, again, computer & technology access were low on the list.

Staff also see **Community Space** as a key part of the future library experience. The highest-ranked trends in this category were collaborative meeting spaces and individual study pods or work nooks, showing a need for both group interaction and private work areas. Flexible community spaces, snack areas, and seminar rooms were also viewed as important. Taken together, the results suggest that staff envision libraries as welcoming, adaptable community hubs that support learning, collaboration, creativity, and social connection while still providing quiet places for concentration and study.



POST-IT NOTE RESULTS

As part of the Library Trends exercise, staff were encouraged not only to react to the ideas presented by the architects, but also to contribute new ideas that they felt were missing from the trend boards. Staff were invited to write additional suggestions on Post-it notes and place them directly onto the boards, creating an opportunity for open-ended feedback beyond the predefined trend categories.

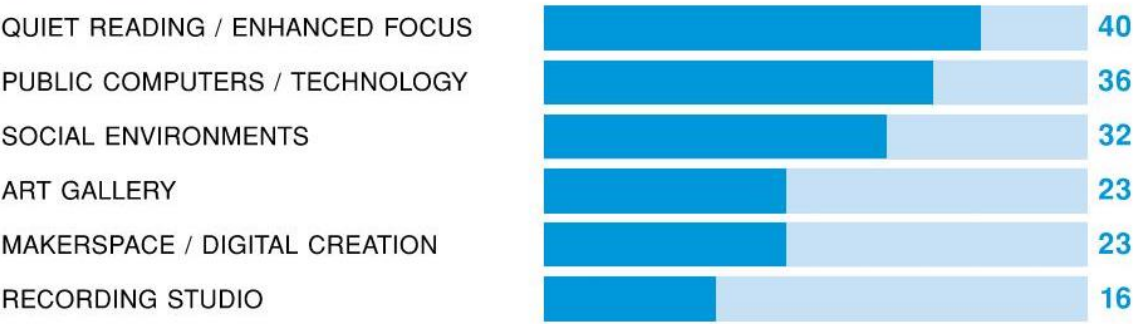
POSTS WITH 5 OR MORE RESPONSES

More access to power	11
Staff access to rooftop space	10
More staff parking	10
Dedicated staff small meeting room	9
Better sightlines from service desks	8
More study rooms	7
Dynamic market-space shelving	7
Additional single-user toilets	6
Better first floor lobby layout	5
Older childrens’ play space	5
Remove decorative fabric walls	5

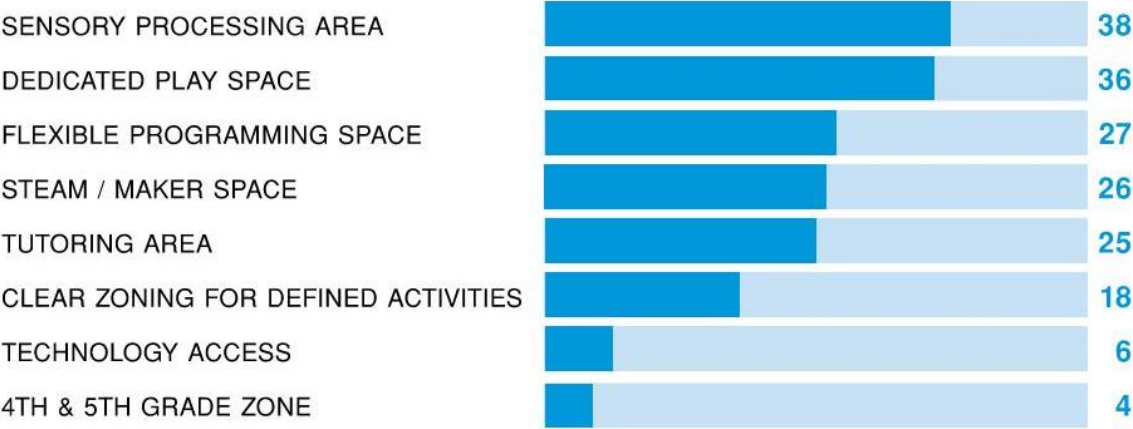


LIBRARY TRENDS RESULTS - STAFF

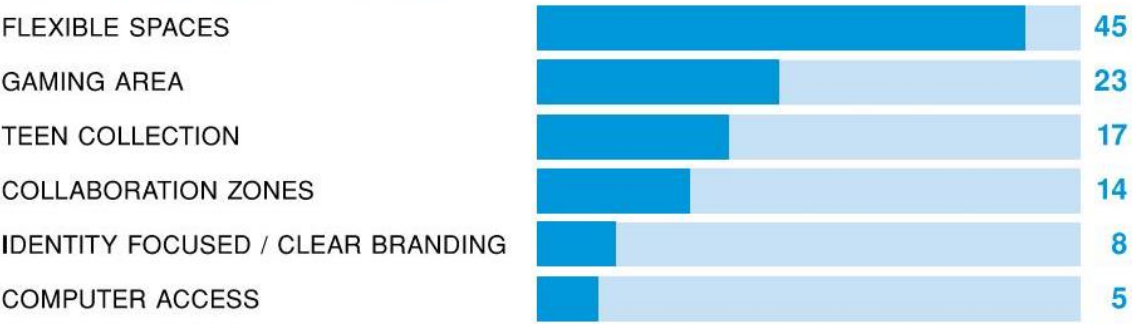
ADULT SERVICES



CHILDRENS SERVICES



MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL SERVICES



COMMUNITY SPACES



1. Visioning

- a. Survey Outreach
- b. Focus Group Surveys
- c. Department Meetings
- d. Community Engagement



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

During Oak Park's annual community festival, A Day in Our Village, residents were invited to participate in the library's strategic facilities planning process and share their perspectives. Community members reviewed a range of potential library trends and identified their priorities by placing stickers on the trends they believed were most important for the library's future. This interactive engagement activity provided valuable insight into community preferences.

The community engagement results reveal a strong desire for the library to continue balancing traditional library functions with expanded opportunities for learning, creativity, and social connection. Among **Adult Services**, the highest priorities identified by participants were quiet reading and enhanced focus spaces and access to public computers and technology, indicating continued demand for dedicated study environments and digital resources. Respondents also expressed interest in art gallery, makerspace and digital creation opportunities, social environments, and a recording studio, reflecting an expectation that libraries support both personal enrichment and creative production

For **Children's Services**, community members placed the greatest emphasis on creating spaces that support exploration, play, and learning. The most requested features included a sensory processing area, dedicated play spaces, and STEAM/Maker activities. Additional priorities included a designated area for 4th and 5th grade users, flexible programming spaces, tutoring areas. Access to technology was low on the priority list. These responses suggest a desire for a children's environment that accommodates a wide range of developmental, educational, and recreational needs.

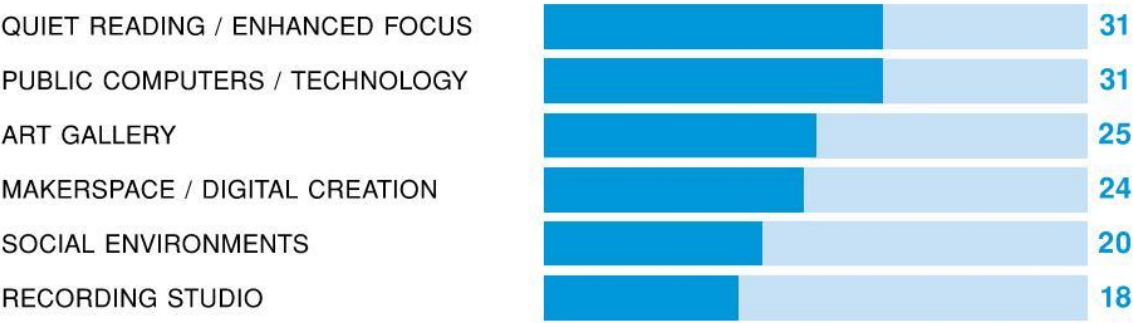
Responses related to **Middle & High School Services** highlighted the importance of providing spaces tailored specifically to teens. Participants identified a need for a strong teen collection, along with gaming areas, collaboration zones. Here, again, access to technology was lower on the priority list and limited interest in a distinct identity and clear branding for teen services.

Community Space priorities centered on flexibility, comfort, and opportunities for both individual and group use. Respondents favored dedicated snack areas, individual study spaces, and flexible community gathering areas, while also expressing support for study carrels, work nooks. Overall, the findings indicate that community members envision the library as both a quiet destination for focused work and a vibrant hub for creativity, collaboration, lifelong learning, and community connection.

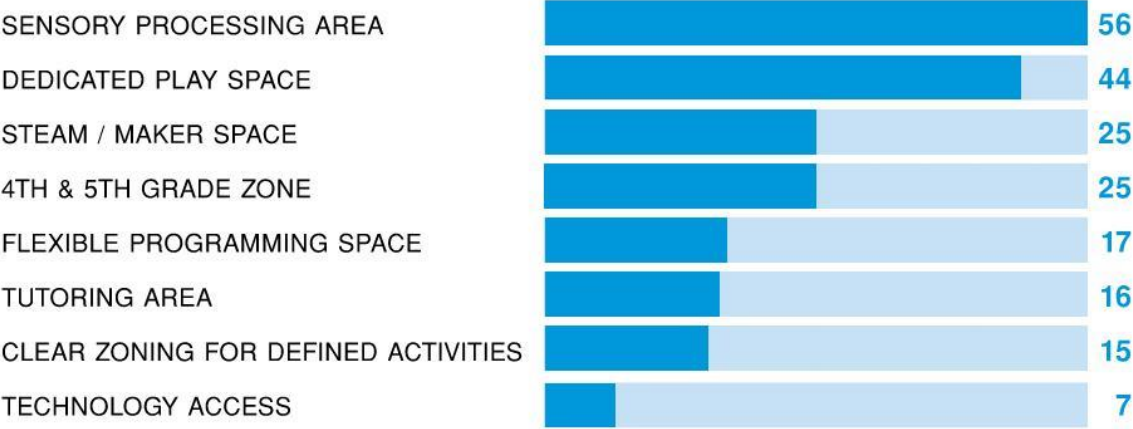


LIBRARY TRENDS RESULTS - COMMUNITY

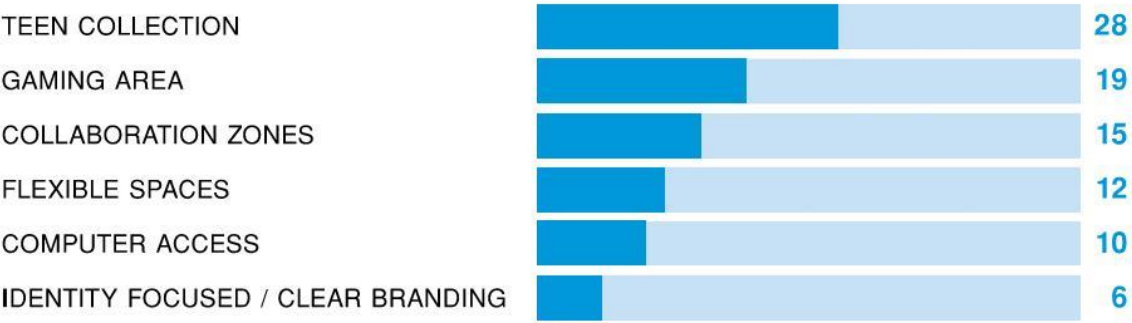
ADULT SERVICES



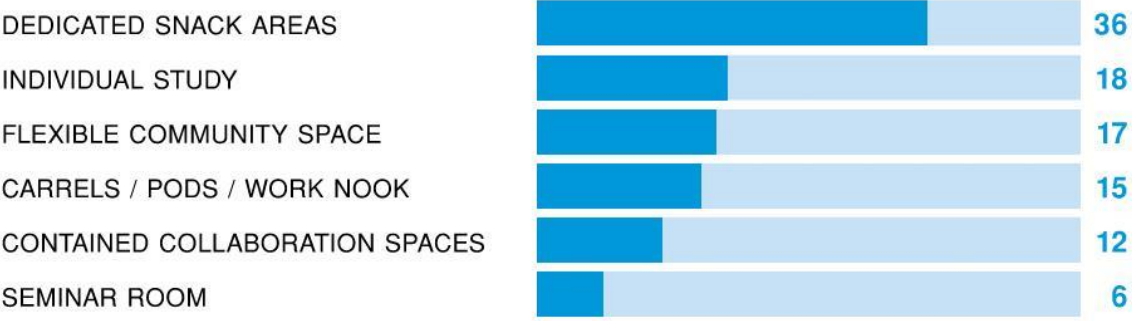
CHILDRENS SERVICES



MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL SERVICES



COMMUNITY SPACES



LIBRARY TRENDS RESULTS - ALIGNMENTS

The results show a remarkably strong alignment between library staff and community members regarding the future role of the library. Both groups envision the library as more than a traditional repository of books; they see it as a place that balances quiet study and reading with opportunities for creativity, technology access, lifelong learning, and social connection. Staff and residents alike identified quiet reading and focused work areas as top priorities, while also expressing interest in makerspaces, digital creation opportunities, art displays, and spaces that encourage community interaction.

Within **Adult Services**, the overlap is especially clear. Staff ranked quiet reading and enhanced focus spaces, public computers and technology, and social environments among their highest priorities. Community members identified those same features as their top preferences, with quiet reading spaces and technology access receiving the strongest support. Both groups also expressed interest in creative amenities such as art galleries, makerspaces, digital creation areas, and recording studios. This suggests a shared belief that libraries should continue supporting traditional reading and learning while expanding opportunities for creative expression and digital engagement.

The alignment is equally strong for **Children’s Services**. Staff and community members both prioritized sensory-friendly environments, dedicated play spaces, and STEAM or maker-focused activities. Flexible programming spaces and tutoring areas were also viewed favorably by both groups. Notably, both staff and residents placed relatively low importance on technology access for children compared to other amenities, indicating a stronger preference for hands-on learning, play, exploration, and developmental support. These findings suggest broad agreement that children’s library spaces should be experiential, adaptable, and supportive of a wide range of learning styles and needs.

For **Middle and High School Services**, staff and community priorities remain generally aligned, though there are some differences in emphasis. Both groups support spaces specifically designed for teens and value gaming areas and strong teen collections. However, staff placed the greatest emphasis on flexible spaces that can accommodate different activities, while community members prioritized teen collections and collaboration zones more highly. Despite these differences, both groups ranked technology access and branding or identity-focused features near the bottom of their lists, indicating consensus that programming, collections, and functional spaces are more important than technology-centered or marketing-oriented amenities.

Community Space preferences also reveal several areas of agreement. Both staff and residents support providing a mix of individual and group-use spaces, reflecting the library’s evolving role as both a quiet retreat and a gathering place. Individual study areas, work nooks, flexible community spaces, and collaborative meeting areas all received strong support. While staff gave the highest priority to collaborative meeting spaces and study pods, the community showed particular interest in dedicated snack areas, individual study spaces, and flexible gathering areas. These differences are complementary rather than conflicting and reinforce a shared desire for a library that accommodates a variety of user needs and activities.

Overall, the results indicate broad consensus between staff and the community on the future direction of the library. Both groups value quiet spaces for focused work, creative and maker-oriented opportunities, welcoming environments for children and teens, and flexible community spaces that support learning, collaboration, and social connection. The consistency across the staff and community responses suggests a strong foundation for future planning decisions, with relatively little disconnect between what library employees believe is important and what residents want from their library experience.

TOP 3 COMBINED TRENDS

ADULT SERVICES

QUIET READING / ENHANCED FOCUS	71
PUBLIC COMPUTERS / TECHNOLOGY	67
SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS	52

MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL SERVICES

FLEXIBLE SPACES	57
TEEN COLLECTION	45
GAMING AREA	42

CHILDRENS SERVICES

SENSORY PROCESSING AREA	94
DEDICATED PLAY SPACE	80
STEAM / MAKER SPACE	51

COMMUNITY SPACES

INDIVIDUAL STUDY	59
CONTAINED COLLAB. SPACES	59
DEDICATED SNACK AREAS	56

LIBRARY TRENDS RESULTS - DISCREPENCIES

While the staff and community demonstrated strong overall alignment on future library priorities, several notable differences emerged. The largest discrepancies between staff and community priorities occurred where one group placed significantly greater value on a feature than the other.

The single biggest difference within the **Children's Services** results was in Sensory Processing Areas. While both groups ranked sensory-friendly spaces as the top priority, the community's level of support was substantially stronger, suggesting parents and caregivers see this as an especially important future investment.

Community members also showed considerably more interest in a dedicated tween area. This suggests families see a need for age-specific spaces that staff did not prioritize.

For **Middle and High School Services**, staff strongly favored adaptable teen environments. Staff appear to value operational flexibility and multipurpose use more than community participants, who instead focused on specific amenities such as teen collections and gaming.

The community expressed much stronger interest in food-friendly spaces for **Community Spaces**. This indicates residents may increasingly view the library as a place for longer stays and informal gathering, whereas staff emphasized more traditional study and meeting environments.

Staff placed much higher value on collaborative meeting spaces than community members. This was actually the largest numerical gap in the entire study. Staff strongly favored enclosed collaborative spaces, likely reflecting observed demand for meetings, group work, and programming, while community members prioritized study areas and casual gathering spaces.

Both groups valued individual study, but staff support was much stronger. Staff consistently emphasized quiet and focused work environments throughout the survey results.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



Despite broad alignment overall, the most notable differences were:

STAFF PRIORITIZED

- > Flexible spaces for teens
- > Contained collaboration spaces
- > Individual study areas
- > Multipurpose environments

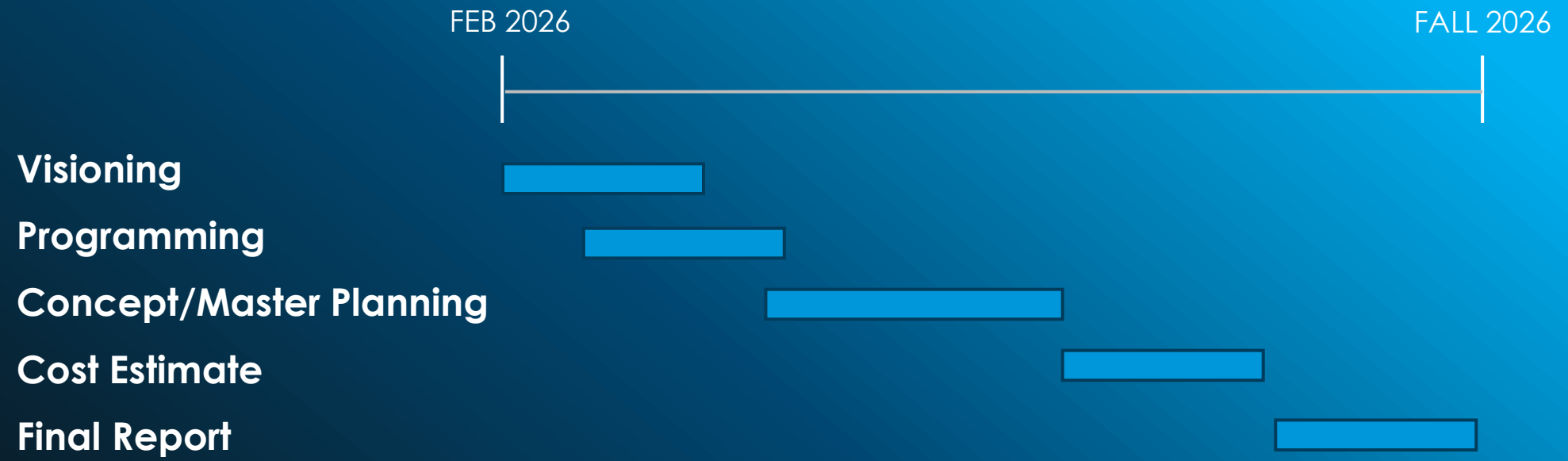
COMMUNITY PRIORITIZED

- > Sensory-friendly children's spaces
- > Dedicated snack areas
- > A dedicated 4th & 5th grade zone
- > Teen collections and age-specific amenities

These discrepancies suggest that staff tend to think in terms of flexibility and space functionality, while community members focus more on specific user experiences and amenities.

The image shows a bright, modern library interior. The ceiling is made of light-colored wood with exposed beams and several large, tiered, cone-shaped pendant lights. Large windows on the left side offer a view of trees outside. In the background, there are bookshelves and a white cylindrical pillar. The text "timeline + next steps" is overlaid in the center in a white, sans-serif font.

timeline + next steps





Q+A



Thank You