

LIBRARY STRATEGIES

The logo for Library Strategies, featuring a stylized teal leaf or book icon to the right of the text.A grayscale photograph of a library shelf filled with books, serving as the background for the top half of the page.

Hudson Area Public Library Community & Facility Needs Assessment

Final Report | May 2024



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PROJECT METHODOLOGY

After preliminary conversations with Library management, Library Strategies proposed a custom project approach for Hudson Area Public Library composed of two dovetailing phases of work. These can be summarized as follows:

Community Assessment: Lead stakeholder engagement exercises to determine what residents need, want and expect from their local library – now and into the future.

Fieldwork / Appraisal: Deploy veteran library space planners to visit the First Street facility and assess the basic pros and cons associated with several possible capital reinvestment options now under discussion.

The interplay between the two is important.

HAPL's acute spatial constraints, as sketched out above, are not "new news" to the groups responsible for the Library's governance and long-range planning. Several possible pathways toward expanding the Library's physical footprint have already been floated. Three which have garnered enough traction to warrant additional exploration are:

1. Hudson P.D. Space: For more than a decade, HAPL has shared its downtown facility with the Hudson Police Department. HPD will soon relocate to a new campus on Hanley Road, allowing the City to repurpose their vacated premises for other use(s). Since the office space in question adjoins HAPL, there is interest in claiming it for library operations. The square footage in question includes 8,300 sq. ft. on the main floor, plus another 10,800 sq. ft. in basement and garage space.

2. Second-Floor Expansion: HAPL's present location is effectively "landlocked." Aside from the HPD space already mentioned, there is no feasible way to significantly expand the Library's ground floor footprint. For high-traffic buildings facing such a predicament, there is limited precedent for expanding the second floor over the parking lot, thereby adding usable interior space without jeopardizing coveted parking space.

3. New Location: HAPL has moved operations twice before and could conceivably do so again. Starting with a proverbial and literal blank slate presents exciting opportunities not otherwise possible given existing constraints. It also brings drawbacks. These include forfeiture of a riverfront plot beloved by many and, of course, the daunting task of finding and securing a new site.

Hudson Area Public Library cannot meaningfully and confidently advance any of these conversations without an understanding of the principal advantages and challenges associated with each option. Eventually, those conversations must involve architects, engineers, and other building professionals. As a point of departure, however, it is necessary to learn more about the suitability and advisability of the above possibilities through the specific lens of *library service*, and that is the intended focus of this report.

FIELDWORK / BUILDING APPRAISAL

Library Strategies regularly provides field assessments of this sort to libraries contending with expansion dilemmas. Our lead consultants have spearheaded or advised on dozens of renovation, expansion and rebuild projects. This institutional knowledge positioned us to identify obstacles and other difficulties associated with each of the above-named options.

Project co-leads Nick Dimassis MLIS and Melissa Brechon MLIS visited Hudson in March 2024 to conduct a site appraisal and high-level operations audit. During this trip, Dimassis and Brechon also received a guided tour of the adjoining police department space and met individually or in small groups with stakeholders who are particularly knowledgeable about the challenges and opportunities facing HAPL at this pivotal moment in the organization's long-range planning.

Insights from this on-site work, coupled with the consulting team's knowledge around library norms and best practices more generally, underpin the findings and recommendations laid out starting on Page 25.

With that said, a consultant's appraisal counts for little unless it is rooted in an understanding of the needs and expectations of the community in which the library is embedded.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

As a national thought leader in library space planning correctly and concisely notes: *"Public libraries are enormously diverse. They represent the full mosaic of American communities. Accordingly, no one can prescribe exactly what each public library should look like."*¹

Phrased another way, no library can plan confidently for its future without a firm understanding of the ever-evolving needs, habits and expectations of the unique community it exists to serve. Exploring long-range investment options therefore requires intentional stakeholder engagement.

As means toward that end, Library Strategies proposed and led a three-pronged effort:

Focus Groups: Over the week of March 4-7, Library Strategies coordinated four 2-hour focus groups with a cross-section of community members. Session composition intentionally reflected a blend of personal backgrounds, occupations, community affiliations, and library usage habits. In total, Library Strategies engaged 36 residents in this way. See Appendix C for a full list of participants and summary of key takeaways. As a companion activity, Brechon and Dimassis also led a SWOT (*"strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats"*) roundtable with HAPL staff members.

¹ Charbonnet, Lisa. *Public Library Buildings: The Librarian's Go-To Guide for Construction, Expansion, and Renovation Projects*. Libraries Unlimited, 2015.

Interviews: As a supplement to the focus groups, HAPL leadership identified additional community members with whom the consultants could conduct hour-long 1:1 interviews. Due to the time-intensive nature of these sit-downs, consultants reserved interview efforts for stakeholders who could offer some outsized knowledge about the Library and the larger landscapes in which it operates (i.e. richer insights than could be mined in a focus group setting). Library Strategies contracted for 4-6 interviews but ultimately conducted eight interviews with nine participants. Interviewee insights and opinions are summarized as Appendix B.

Community Survey: Last, in the interest of securing inputs from the broadest possible swathe of residents, Library Strategies also crafted and administered a community survey. The questionnaire probed residents' unmet and under-met needs, as well as aspirations and apprehensions around HAPL's future. Although conducted online, Library staff also made paper copies available on-site and throughout the community. All told, promotional efforts yielded an impressive 940 response sets. Quantitative and qualitative takeaways are condensed into an executive summary available here as Appendix A.

DEMOGRAPHICS

As anyone familiar with the area can attest, Hudson and St. Croix County are growing at a marked pace. Hudson proper experienced a population boom of 62% from 2000-2019 (from 8,775 to 14,094 residents). This robust residential growth is projected to continue apace. As the City of Hudson Comprehensive Plan notes, citing statistics from the Wisconsin Dept. of Administration, "the City's population will grow to 20,780 by 2040... approximately a 47% increase." This trajectory puts Hudson above the state average – and in the top 3% of all Wisconsin communities.

Much the same can be said for St. Croix County more generally. The state Department of Administration puts it succinctly: "St. Croix is projected to be the fastest-growing county, in terms of percentage change, through 2040 – increasing by 41% [over 2010 census numbers]." Development on this level is nothing new. Due to favorable factors including its proximity to the Twin Cities metro, St. Croix also held distinction as Wisconsin's top-growing county for the period 1980-2010.

Growth on this scale has significant repercussions for a community's infrastructure and long-range planning. Among many other considerations, demographic forecasts must factor into any measured evaluation of the local public library system – both its current means and future viability.

In the Hudson 2040 Comprehensive Plan, the City acknowledges this responsibility among its long-range objects:

"Ensure that the Hudson Area Public Library will meet the future needs of a growing and changing population." (pg. 5-30)

However, as of today no specific groundwork has been laid for this next chapter in HAPL's history.

LIBRARY HISTORY

Hudson Area Public Library (HAPL) boasts an early history that few peer libraries in the Upper Midwest can match. Its story dates to the early 1900s, when area businessmen lobbied philanthropist Andrew Carnegie to bankroll one of the first so-called "Carnegie libraries" in the nation. Its historic home on Locust Street served the community well for decades. In time, however, this small and rigid physical footprint proved an impediment to effective library service in a rapidly developing area.

In the 1980s, the City of Hudson purchased an existing building on Fourth Street and dedicated 8,100 square feet for the library. The new, larger, more modern library opened in the summer of 1985 and served the community for more than 20 years.

In late 2009, the Hudson City Council approved purchase of the former Nuclear Management Co. (Xcel Energy) property on First Street to co-house library operations and the local police department. Renovation investments in that riverfront property allowed HAPL to grow to its current 19,024 square feet (representing an immediate increase of approx. 11,000 square feet). While the new location ameliorated some of the more acute space challenges, the retrofitted nature of the two-story office space also brought with it a set of compromises and complications. These will each be discussed in more detail in the subsequent section of this report.

Over the past decade, HAPL's effectiveness has been hampered still further by complex financing concerns and other fundamental governance issues. For the most part, those intragovernmental intricacies and frictions fall outside the scope of what this report looks to explore. However, it is critical to note that the dissolution of the former Hudson Area Joint Library district did not "rezone" and limit HAPL's service area to the City of Hudson.

According to library service definitions and data maintained by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, the Library's local service area is 32,433 as of the 2023 reporting period. HAPL's performance, constraints, and future-planning should all be considered with this baseline figure in mind, rather than the < 16,000 who currently reside within the Hudson city limits.

BASIC BUILDING APPRAISAL

As an initial “litmus test” for understanding the suitability of a library’s brick-and-mortar footprint, many architects and space planners recommend a simple formula for communities < 50,000 residents. Divide the existing square footage into the library’s legal service area (i.e., the total population served by that institution, regardless of whether those residents are cardholders). If that calculation indicates that the Library in question offers less than 0.9 square feet of space per resident, it is likely that the building offers inadequate space to fully meet the community’s present needs.²

This durable and widely used formulation considers the varied functions of a typical public library space and the relative space requirements of each, both today and into the forecastable future. It encompasses many evolving norms with direct implications for physical space. Contributing factors of particular note include the following:³

- ✓ Over the past three decades, libraries have expanded on their most traditional functions (as “book spaces”) and come into their own as dynamic and in-demand “people spaces.” This new normal is already reflected in Hudson, insofar as building restrictions allow, as demonstrated by community commentary about HAPL’s existing meeting, study and program spaces (pgs. 11-17).
- ✓ Libraries retain their fundamental value proposition as “book spaces,” but circulation looks different in 2024 than it did in 2004 – or even 2014. This is attributable to the proliferation and wide adoption of e-materials, particularly ebooks. Print circulation has declined as a result (equivalent to approx. 16% nationally between FY2014 and FY2018, according to IMLS).⁴ While this pivot to digital formats has since slowed precipitously, the introduction of e-collections has allowed some libraries to condense the physical space required to display and warehouse their print collections. However, since books are housed in dense configurations, the space freed up in this way is almost always modest. Gains are typically reallocated to “people spaces,” which require a more substantial square footage allocation.

² In many states, a precise square-foot-per-resident benchmark is prescribed by the state library. Some are slightly lower but most much higher than the 0.9 yardstick presented here. The Wisconsin Library Standards maintained by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction do not stipulate any such number. However, it bears noting that as of the date of this report, the majority of Wisconsin’s ongoing library construction and expansion projects (including Fall Creek, Sun Prairie and Whitehall) provision for a square footage allocation that *exceeds* the 0.9. per capita benchmark.

Even so, Library Strategies is employing the 0.9 metric in this report because it is a common minimum standard and illustrates HAPL’s space constraints without suggesting far-fetched solutions.

³ For further reading, consider: “Library Services in the Digital Age: What People Want From Their Libraries,” *Pew Research Center* (January 22, 2013); “Community Building: For Modern Libraries, Bringing People Together Is Fundamental,” *Library Journal* (Oct. 17; 2023).

⁴ “The Use and Cost of Public Library Materials,” *Institute of Museum & Library Services* (January 2021).
Note: The median circulation of *electronic* materials per person increased by nearly 150% over this same period.

For HAPL, that simplified math is as follows: **19,024 sq. ft. ÷ 32,433 pop. = .586 sq. ft. per resident**

While stark enough on its face, HAPL’s acute spatial issues can also be contextualized against the physical assets of other Wisconsin libraries in its “weight class.”⁵ Data mineable from state-mandated annual reports and the federal Public Library Survey indicates that eight public libraries in Wisconsin serve a base population between 25,000-35,000 and do so from a single full-service location. Within that sample set, HAPL ranks second to last (behind the North Shore Library in Glendale) in absolute space and last in square footage per capita.

Public Library	County	Pop.	Sq. Ft.	Sq. Ft. / Resident	Support (Per Capita)
West Bend Community Memorial Library	Washington	32,255	67,000	2.08	\$28.38
Neenah Public Library	Winnebago	27,560	50,000	1.81	\$56.40
Manitowoc Public Library	Manitowoc	34,475	54,120	1.57	\$53.18
Muskego Public Library	Waukesha	25,496	40,000	1.57	\$46.98
Frank L. Weyenberg Library	Ozaukee	28,335	33,600	1.19	\$42.97
Fitchburg Public Library	Dane	34,019	38,000	1.12	\$63.81
North Shore Library	Milwaukee	26,112	16,160	0.62	\$37.12
Hudson Area Public Library	St. Croix	32,433	19,024	0.59	\$23.03

Prior benchmark analyses conducted for HAPL, including one undertaken as part of a 2022 report by IFLS system director John Thompson, employed slightly different parameters to determine HAPL’s “peers” and overall space needs – but come to the same undeniable conclusions.⁶

Furthermore, HAPL’s overall space deficit is exacerbated by other variables. It must be noted that a significant proportion of the existing 19,024 square feet is devoted to staff areas and so-called unassignable space – areas that are essential for, but peripheral to, the library’s core work.

Unassignable functions include restrooms, mechanical equipment, hallways and stairwells. (Assignable spaces, by contrast, include book stacks, meeting rooms, service desks and other areas that contribute directly to the primary function of the building.)

⁵ Dissolution of the joint library compact impacts the funding mechanisms in play. As of today, County dollars and population are no longer part of the base formula; rather, the residents pay a library tax to the County, which reimburses HAPL based on rural resident use. Based on the new, city-specific lens, per capita funding is \$46.52. This paradigm shift is not yet reflected in data pools available at the state and federal levels.

In any case, pre-2024 budget figures are preferable for the exercise at hand because they more accurately convey past structural deficits – a long-term handicap that continues to inform HAPL’s day-to-day reality in various ways.

⁶ This earlier evaluation, dated June 2022, employed a “bottom up” approach recommended by the Wisconsin Division for Libraries and Technology’s Public Library Development Team and is a worthwhile companion read to this report. Formulations employed by Thompson laddered up to a need for 39,000 - 43,000 square feet.

Another area that factors prominently into any discussion of interior size is HAPL's large ground floor lobby. This is a space asset that staff have reconceptualized and utilize to the best of their ability. However, that alone cannot negate the fact that this generous piece of square footage is a clear legacy of the building's former life as an office building. It is sub-optimal for library functions.

Reference this section's footnotes and the report's long-term recommendations (pg. 28) for additional information about estimating and fine-tuning general square footage allocations.

[CONTINUED]

TIMETABLE AND SCALE FACTORS

When scrutinizing the space available today, it is also important to look ahead to the foreseeable future. Based on the above formula, HAPL is arguably more than 10,000 square feet – or approx. 53% – smaller than what would be required to meet the 0.9 sq. ft./resident standard (and the expectations for satisfactory library service which underpin that measure).

32,433 pop. x 0.9 sq. ft./resident = approx. 29,200 sq. ft.
29,200 sq. ft. - 19,024 sq. ft. = 10,176 sq. ft.

However, it should be underscored that capital reinvestment in a library facility does not take place overnight. Even in a best-case scenario, approving, funding, designing and fully implementing a building project (whether an expansion or new construction) takes years to achieve. Unless extenuating circumstances inform a more accelerated timetable, the process can take as long as 5-10 years from start to finish. If the community greenlights an as-yet-unidentified capital improvement for Hudson Area Public Library, it is reasonable to estimate 2030 as a viable year for completion.

While no such investment is *assured*, we feel this is still a useful target for extrapolating needed square footage into the future.

Since population growth is the norm for most of the country, space planners responsible for library build-outs advise floor plans large enough to accommodate at least 10 years of growth – *as calculated from the date of ribbon cutting*. Given these two factors, HAPL should *not* aspire to a facility of 29,200 sq. ft., which is the minimal footprint needed to meet the baseline industry standard for *today's* needs.

Given the clear upward trajectory for both the City of Hudson [+47% between 2020-2040] and St. Croix County generally [+41% between 2010-2040], the Library can reliably expect to experience significant growth in its patron base area between now and 2040 – and should advocate for itself and residents accordingly.

As already noted, HAPL's service area expands beyond the Hudson city limits but does not encompass the whole of the county, meaning that neither demographic projection is a perfect match for the Library. However, for the purposes of this report an averaged and conservative 40% growth target is sufficient.

1.4 x 32,433 pop. = 45,406 pop.
45,406 pop. x 0.9 sq. ft. = 40,865 sq. ft.

In short, Hudson will require a library facility roughly double its current size if HAPL is to fully meet the community's needs and expectations.

Expansion on a less ambitious scale would of course pay dividends, particularly over the short term. However, a more modest addition to the Library's overall square footage would also perpetuate some of the pain points currently experienced by guests and require difficult space compromises on the part of Library leadership.

KEY THEMES

What follows is a synthesis of significant, building-based themes that emerged clearly across the various community engagement activities undertaken in support of this assessment. Representative quotes are provided where helpful. Direct quotes come from the community survey (Appendix A) unless otherwise specified.

Library Location

While a modern public library is decidedly more than simply the building out of which it operates, there is no escaping the fact that community conversations about HAPL's performance, priorities and potential invariably lead back to fundamental questions about size and location.

In the community's consciousness, HAPL is closely tied to the downtown, riverfront area in which the Library has been embedded for more than a decade. However, opinions around the adequacy of the current location on First Street differ - often markedly.

Two camps emerged among the residents engaged as part of this project: those who feel that the current location's benefits outweigh inherent limitations, and those who contend that shortcomings overshadow the location's purported benefits. See Appendices A & C, particularly pages 35-37, for a detailed breakdown of both perspectives and the spectrum in between.

Put succinctly, the former group contends that HAPL and Hudson's downtown district enjoy an almost symbiotic relationship: the Library draws residents downtown, while other downtown amenities or needs (e.g. shopping, restaurants, park play) drive added traffic to the Library. In contrast, detractors argue that a downtown location is inconvenient for a large swathe of HAPL's service area – or more forcefully still, that the downtown location is a barrier and active deterrent to many within the Library's service area. This camp posits that another location – specifically, one closer to Hudson's current and projected residential and commercial growth areas – can better meet current and future patron needs.

Overall Library Size

For a land-constrained library like HAPL, questions of building location are intrinsically tied to size considerations. On this critical point there is broad-based agreement. Even patrons who rave about the naturescapes and downtown proximities afforded by the First Street location are quick to note that interior space (or rather, a lack thereof) contributes to a library experience that falls short of their needs and expectations.

As is explored in more detail in Appendix A, nuanced, often “double-barreled” comments about the library’s location and size are commonplace. Many comments are built around a stated or implied *but*:

- “Location is amazing but more space is needed.”
- “Location is great but size I feel should be rethought about.”
- “The location is fine. The areas feel tight.”
- “Location: It’s great to have the library on the river and as part of Hudson’s cultural amenities. Size: It would be better if the library could handle more books.”

Space constraints manifest in a variety of ways. Given the multi-faceted nature of modern library work and the broad-based lens of this assessment project, it makes sense to give an overview of each of the more major areas.

Parking Challenges

Without a doubt, the shortage of convenient, reliable parking spots is the single biggest flashpoint for visitor dissatisfaction. Regular guests, sporadic patrons, and self-described nonusers all agree that on-site parking is too limited.

Compounding this scarcity, different rates and procedures govern the several parking options available to patrons. Parking in the Library’s own lot is free, but guests are required to register their vehicle with HAPL. Street parking requires no such registration, but comes with a cost. Parking across First Street at the beach lot is free and requires no special action on the part of the driver. Unsurprisingly, these differing rules have engendered confusion and further frustration.

While library traffic has natural ebbs and flows throughout a given day and week, meaning that overdemand is not constant, the parking challenge is nevertheless acute enough to be a *defining* feature of the library visitation experience.

- “I drive farther to go to other libraries because of ease of parking.”
- “Parking is atrocious and so is the hill. We avoid in winter.”
- “Parking is a problem and an obstacle to me physically using the library.”
- “Parking lot is tight and often full, making street parking and crossing necessary.”

Programming Space

Residents who offered opinions and experiences concerning HAPL's programming slate generally speak positively about what their Library is able to achieve with finite resources: limited staff, budget, but above all *space*. In particular, children's story times, exhibits and other youth-centered offerings are called out for frequent praise. With that said, the Library's performance in this area still falls well short of both patron aspirations and staff ambitions. Practical checks on HAPL's programmatic outputs tie directly to physical space.

In lieu of a dedicated large programming space, a staple feature in libraries designed today, HAPL staff must hold major programs of all kinds in the lobby. Doing so in this central, open space interrupts the ambiance for, and goals of, patrons in other areas of the Library – and at the same time, cannot always guarantee a physical place or positive experience for all would-be program attendees.

- “It would be so nice if the library just had one bigger space for programs vs. using the lobby.”
- “The library seems to make use of every bit of space it has. Sometimes, i.e. for kids programs, these seem cramped for the number of participants.”
- “The lobby gets very tight with big programs.”
- “It was quite noisy from a kids’ program going on in the lobby. I was wishing for a quieter area.”
- “[We] need a bigger community space for events for the community to use, with projector, microphone, piano, etc. That would be so nice to have!”

If anything, adult-oriented offerings are impacted even more by this same dearth of space in which to hold programs and other special events. In addition to noise challenges, programs on this scale require temporary closure of the staircase (requiring visitors seeking the second floor to divert to the elevator). This is confusing and unpleasant for those patrons, some of whom even report scrapping their plans entirely once they see the jam-packed lobby.

Staff have attempted to remediate this issue by holding some of HAPL's more popular events at off-site locations. While that strategy presents some advantages, it also brings further patron confusion about where to go. For example, families seeking a children's event hosted at a park will often travel to the Library instead out of habit or presumption.

Many residents contextualize perceived needs within the larger landscape in which HAPL operates. The City of Hudson does not maintain a dedicated community or senior center, meaning that residents do not have access to the range of affordable (including free) enrichment and entertainment options that those civic amenities traditionally make available. While a library is not expected to fill that void entirely, its presence as one of the community's only public hubs *in theory* positions it to address at least some of these expressed but under-met needs.

- “I'd like to see the library be more of a hub for programming for adults. I feel like I know a lot more about children and teen activities, but not much for adults.”
- “Would love to see more adult programs and author visits.”

- “I would attend adult (16+) programs and events if there were more available.”
- “[I] want classes for adults – ways to be with other people.”
- “I would love more events / activities for adults that are in their 20s so that I could meet other readers similar to me in age.”

In practice, of course, physical space is an obstacle – one that cannot be addressed meaningfully within the confines of the existing square footage. For the most part, the same can also be said of other HAPL “group spaces,” particularly meeting rooms.

Meeting Rooms

Hudson residents noted consistently that their community offers precious few low- or no-cost meeting spaces for small groups to convene and collaborate. HAPL is an illustrative case in point, since it holds just one bookable space for groups of 8+ participants. That deficit feels particularly incongruous when considered against the Library’s own stated mission, which reads in part: “connect people to... *each other*.”⁷

- “[We] need a community meeting room with flexible seating options (thinking of tables for board and card games, place for knitters/crafters to meet and socialize).”
- “Would love to see more bookable space for studying with classmates.”
- “Our HOA met in the large meeting room on the 2nd floor and we were crowded. Could have used a larger room.”
- “I think our library should offer a top-of-the-line conference room suite - Hudson's best. We're not great as a community in this regard.”

As that last comment alludes, this particular building pinch point is exacerbated greatly by the lack of a true community hub or other “third place” spaces in the area – i.e. private or semi-private rooms where hobby clubs, small corporate teams, area nonprofits, etc. can congregare and accomplish their business. This under-met need manifested itself in comments like the following:

- “Hudson does not have enough meeting places. Coffee shops are cramped. YMCA requires membership. Parks are seasonal. Churches are not well suited.”
- “There are not many places to meet that are nonprofit budget friendly.”
- “Lean into the third space thing. People need a place to exist without being expected to spend money, so need more meeting rooms.”
- “The current location could use more community meeting space or open gathering space. It's hard to book the conference rooms and seems crowded, especially when there are special exhibits like the space exhibit being shown.”

⁷ Over a recent, 3-month period, HAPL staff tracked all requests for meeting rooms. During that period the Library turned down 39 groups who wished to use the conference suite due simply to room schedule capacity.

Study and Reading Spaces

Solo work is the important corollary to *group work*. Now as ever, a significant portion of visitors also want their public library to be an accessible, welcoming space for quiet, individual pursuits: leisure reading, research, homework, and the like. In practice, however, the retrofitted nature of the current building and limiting floorplan once again provide a serious check on HAPL's ability to meet this traditional, reasonable expectation for library space.⁸

- "I've never felt comfortable with the library. There is that long narrow walkway along river windows with several small seating areas but it's not inviting. It's like just space remaining after the stacks got crammed in."
- "[I] need private study rooms and more/any tables to accommodate laptops and research materials."
- "I would love to have more quiet study spaces that are not meeting rooms."
- "I'd love to see places that allow for people to find a nook where they could study or read in a quiet way, away from people coming and going."

Children's Areas / Amenities

Families with young children are extremely appreciative for what HAPL makes available to its youngest patrons, and this sentiment is difficult to overstate. Even more so than loanable collections, parents and caregivers speak highly of the "play and learn" components of the second-floor children's area – the free play area, toys, passive activities, and the creative touches that staff add to enliven and maximize this space.

- "The children's toys, play area, and books are the most important part of the library for our family."
- "It's a great place to meet with other parents and learn from each other and socialize the kids."

However, here as elsewhere, HAPL's ability to cater fully to the needs of this vital demographic is hampered by a restrictive physical footprint.

Specific examples help to prove this larger point. Space (and dovetailing issues) force staff to rotate popular "sensory room" resources in and out of the Library on a set schedule – much to the chagrin of families who need and value those amenities. In addition, the modest floorplan necessitates prioritization of resources geared towards pre- elementary school children at the expense of older kids (1st-4th grade). This discrepancy, while understandable given circumstances, is felt by families and is particularly disadvantageous for households with kids of varied ages.

⁸ Over a recent, 3-month period, HAPL staff tracked all requests for quiet study rooms. During that period the Library regretfully turned down 109 guests who wanted but could not find such a space on site.

- “I love the children’s area and I really wish it could be bigger and the sensory room be open more.”
- “It’s a little crowded in [the] children’s due to [the] amount of toys that are out and accessible.”
- “Being a retired teacher and a parent I would like to see enlarged children and teen spaces to accommodate and invite our youth into defined areas that address their interests and needs.”
- “I think the library does an excellent job catering to little ones, and also has the separate teen section...but there’s not much specifically for those middle kids.”

In other respects, HAPL’s creativity and strong performance *in spite of* space-related challenges positions the Library as the proverbial “victim of its own success.”⁹

High, sustained interest in story times and other quality programs is noticed by and tends to attract still more guests. Unfortunately, and contrary to both patron expectations and industry norms, HAPL does not maintain a large, dedicated space for programs. No on-site location can comfortably accommodate the current (let alone potential) draw of HAPL’s children’s programming. Compounding matters, the demand for and multipurpose nature of interior space curbs the frequency at which popular programs can be offered.

- “Very satisfied with the programming quality but wish there was more.”
- “Children’s story time would be nicer in a room with doors so I wouldn’t worry as much about my kids running rampant.”
- “The children’s area is the only crowded area I’ve noticed.”
- “Children’s area maybe feels a bit small during times when it is very busy.”

Children’s program challenges also bring concomitant frustrations for library visitors who are patronizing the Library for unrelated reasons. In the current building blueprint, crowd “overflow” and inevitable noise bleed from children’s programs is noticeable and often disruptive.

- “I find the space claustrophobic and frankly think there is too much spillover of children’s area noise.”
- “As a visitor to the library during busy times in the children’s area, the space can be PACKED with children and their adults, and the area round the self checkout often has the overflow. Clearly more space is needed to serve this population of library users.”
- “Overall, I feel things could be spaced out a little more. I come on days where there are usually a lot of children for various events and the upstairs can start to feel a little cramped.”

⁹ As an illustrative example of HAPL’s impressive outputs, Hudson’s library conducts five story times a week. This is the most of any library in the county. It is equivalent to the story time frequency maintained by the L.E. Phillips Library in Eau Claire, which caters to a service area roughly three times the population of that served by HAPL.

Collections / Shelving

Where physical collections are concerned, HAPL's weak standing – both relative to library peers and against minimum recommended levels prescribed by the Wisconsin Public Library Standards – is well documented. A recent audit conducted by IFLS Library System (of which HAPL is a part) quantified that shortfall and calculated that an additional spending of \$750,000-\$1,000,000 on materials over the next 20 years will be required simply to rectify this collection imbalance to the point where Hudson again meets Wisconsin's *minimum* standard.

Unfortunately, that budget alone would make little difference. Space constraints, together with floor load limitations in the current facility, make it impossible for HAPL to prioritize net gains to its physical collections on anything near that scale.

Many patrons are cognizant of the issues in play, and a still larger proportion of residents report negative first-hand experiences with the collections as they currently stand. Paramount concerns include limited copies of and prohibitive wait periods for new releases; a thin selection of "backlist" titles across many categories; and the too-frequent need to take advantage of the broader MORE Libraries catalog to secure materials they need (albeit with a time delay).

- "The library collection should not be limited by a floor that can't hold the weight."
- "Either the second floor needs to be fixed so it can hold more books or I feel the location should change so that there is more room for the collection."
- "[I] sometimes have to wait a long time to get books from other libraries because we don't have the book in Hudson."
- "It would be better if the library could handle more books."

REINVESTMENT OPTION 1: POLICE DEPARTMENT

For more than a decade, HAPL has shared its downtown facility with the Hudson Police Department. Police will soon relocate to a new campus on Hanley Road, allowing the City to repurpose their vacated premises for other uses. Since the office space in question adjoins HAPL, there is interest in claiming it for library operations. The square footage in question includes 8,300 sq. ft. on the main floor, plus another 10,800 sq. ft. in basement and garage space.

In point of fact, the Library's expansion into this adjoining space is consistent with the City's original intentions for the building. When initially purchased, the co-location solution was meant as fairly temporary arrangement and to last no longer than 2015, after which point the HPD would reside elsewhere and HAPL occupy the vacated space. A referendum required to actualize those earlier plans failed.

Consultant Note: In conjunction with other fieldwork conducted in support of this project, Library Strategies consultants Nick Dimassis MLIS and Melissa Brechon MLIS toured the Hudson PD premises at 101 Vine Street on March 8, 2024. Police Chief Geoffrey Willems and Mayor Rich O'Connor accompanied Dimassis and Brechon on this walk-through, giving access to all police spaces covered by this appraisal and providing the consultants context needed to fully understand the utility and drawbacks of the facility.

As of this writing, no firm move-out date is set for the police department (est. Spring 2025) and the City of Hudson has yet to make a determination about the subsequent fate of this location.

Advantage 1.1: Retain Existing Location: The majority of HAPL patrons, and even Hudson residents who seldom visit the Library, are in principle favorable to the idea of a downtown, riverfront library. Expanding the Library's footprint on its existing city block would make conceptual sense to these stakeholders (particularly before more specific questions about renovations costs and square footage opportunities necessarily complicate the picture).

Advantage 1.2: Square Footage Gains: When the Hudson PD relocates from Vine & First, the 8,300 sq. ft. vacated would allow for a meaningful (if far from perfect) reconfiguration of library spaces and functions. In particular, the space in question could be earmarked for children's services, meeting spaces, or for the accessible storage of physical collections – all three of which are significant pain points for patrons, as is explained in greater detail elsewhere in this report.

Advantage 1.3: Non-Public Spaces: In addition to those spaces easily conceptualized as public zones, the vacating Hudson PD will also leave behind additional areas that could alleviate vexing challenges experienced by staff "behind the scenes." The indoor garage and adjacent interior entryway could be co-opted for library staff parking (and thus take a little pressure off the in-demand public parking). Garage and basement space could also be devoted to library storage, thereby de-cluttering several staff spaces that are currently serving double duty. As a third example, staff would benefit from a kitchen and breakroom set-up that is relatively central within the building's overall floor plan.

Disadvantage 1.1: Parking: If the Library takes ownership of the vacated police offices, that addition will bring with it a negligible number of new parking spaces. In other words, this investment would not address the acute parking issues that so obviously hamper the experience of many library users. In point of fact, this method for expansion will likely *exacerbate* the challenges experienced during high-traffic periods by allowing HAPL to more fully realize its programming ambitions – but without any corresponding increase in parking capability.

Disadvantage 1.2: Adjacencies: Retrofits to the police facility could effectively make HAPL a three-floor library with an atypical blueprint and sub-optimal adjacencies. *Adjacency* is the architectural term for the spacing and relationships (intentional or otherwise) between different elements within a building. As a general rule, disjointed library interiors complicate directional wayfinding, inhibit sightlines, and (perhaps most importantly) require a higher level of staffing per square foot than does a more conventional floorplan. Even if a floorplan of this kind was otherwise desirable, it would be extremely difficult for HAPL staff to monitor public spaces at their current level of attentiveness without a permanent increase to frontline staffing levels.

Disadvantage 1.3: Space Deficit: HPD is leaving behind 8,300 square feet of ground floor space (as well as a basement and garage that together span 10,800 square feet, including significant unassignable space needed for mechanicals). While this expansion would ease some of the space-related tensions experienced by staff and patrons, particularly over the short term, this addition would not compensate completely for the existing space deficit – let alone position Hudson to attain the larger library its demographic trajectory will require in the decades to come.

Disadvantage 1.4: Renovation Costs: Specific construction estimates fall outside the scope of this report. However, it is generally understood among space planners – and well worth noting here – that retrofitting an existing space for library operations requires more “pre-work” and is often less economical than the average resident would expect. Wholesale conversion of existing facilities ordinarily triggers stringent code requirements, and this in turn can add significant expense towards overall conversion costs. Consultants and inspectors will need to scrutinize everything from restrooms, to sprinkler systems, to electrical wiring to ensure compliance with all applicable building codes.

Disadvantage 1.5: HVAC: The Hudson PD’s existing heating, ventilation and air conditioning system provides inconsistent temperature control. Even when functioning to the best of its ability, this mechanical infrastructure heats and cools different rooms/zones with varying levels of effectiveness. Given the expenses associated with an HVAC overhaul, this item merits calling out on its own.

REINVESTMENT OPTION 2: SECOND-FLOOR EXPANSION

HAPL's present location is effectively "landlocked" and offers few feasible ways to significantly expand the Library's ground story footprint. For high-traffic buildings facing such a predicament, there is some limited precedent for expanding the second floor over the parking lot, thereby adding usable interior space without jeopardizing coveted parking space.

Consultant Note: HAPL's public parking already falls well short of patron expectations and the guidelines set forth through the Wisconsin Public Library Standards. As such, any expansion proposition which adds interior space at the direct expense of the property's finite parking is impractical and discouraged.

On the surface, this space optimization challenge is not new or remarkable. Central and/or large libraries constructed today on "modest" plots are often situated adjacent to public parking ramps or designed with underground parking to mitigate the parking challenge. As is typically the case with *existing* buildings, however, neither of those solutions is an option for HAPL.

A basic understanding of this conundrum sparked interest from library leadership in exploring the viability of building a second-floor expansion over existing parking. In theory, this would add valuable interior space with negligible adverse impact on the existing parking lot. Precedent for build-outs of this type is more minimal, but noteworthy. Recent comparisons indicate a high project price tag relative to square footage gained. As one illustrative case in point, the Lafourche (LA) Parish Library partnered with Duplantis Design Group in 2021 on a second-story build out to its Thibodaux Library branch. This capital investment added 6,800 needed square feet above ground-story parking, but at the cost of \$3.5m.

Advantage 2.1: Retain Existing Location: The majority of HAPL patrons, and even Hudson residents who seldom visit the Library, are in principle favorable to the idea of a downtown, riverfront library. Expanding the Library's footprint on its existing city block would make conceptual sense to these stakeholders (particularly before more specific questions about renovations costs and square footage opportunities necessarily complicate the picture). Reinvestment of this nature would allow the Library to "double down" on its value proposition as a locus for civic pride ("your home on the river.")

Advantage 2.2: Square Footage Gains: A major construction project along these lines could add at least 10,000 square feet to the Library's interior. New space would most likely be devoted to a new children's area, an all-purpose programming space, and/or shelving ranges for adult materials. Relocation of those features would also ease pressure on other library spaces and functions. While this addition would not fully resolve HAPL's space-related issues, the difference would be palpable in many ways.

Advantage 2.3: Load-Bearing Floors: HAPL’s legacy as a former office space has presented several persistent problems for library operations, but few are as vexing as the limitations the building imposes on physical collections. This is not a matter of space alone. Flooring strength is another factor. Simply put, shelving ranges are a defining feature of public libraries – particularly their second stories. In order to handle the weight associated with so many linear feet of shelving and books, library floors must be graded to carry live loads equivalent to 150 pounds per square foot. This is a standard that fairly few repurposed structures meet, but that a purpose-built, second-floor build out could potentially achieve. That added space and flexibility would also, by extension, allow the Library to consider major and beneficial reconfiguration within HAPL’s *existing* second-floor footprint.

Disadvantage 2.1: Parking: A second-story buildout would not address the acute parking issues that so obviously hamper the experience of many library users. In point of fact, preservation of the parking lot in this way may necessitate the removal of several spots for structural supports (depending on the design). Furthermore, this method for expansion will exacerbate the challenges experienced during high-traffic periods by allowing HAPL to more fully realize its programming ambitions – but without any corresponding increase in parking capability.

Disadvantage 2.2: Continued Space Challenges: While this creative addition would ease some of the space-related tensions experienced by staff and patrons, particularly over the short term, this investment alone would offer only approximately half of the square footage needed to 1) remedy existing space deficits and 2) account for projected population growth.

Disadvantage 2.3: Cost-Benefit Analysis: Specific construction estimates fall outside the scope of this report, and a detailed feasibility study must be undertaken before a probable project price tag can be known. With that said, a preliminary investment of that sort is likely to yield a cost-benefit analysis that makes the public investment needed for a second-story build out difficult to justify. As a comparable example, the Lafourche (LA) Parish Library case study cited earlier added only 6,800 square feet but came at the hefty cost of \$3.5m – or nearly \$515/square foot.

Disadvantage 2.4: Disjointed Floor Plan: Expanding over the parking lot would result in an unconventional and sub-optimal building blueprints. As a general rule, floor plans that are open in character are easier for patrons to navigate and (in general) lend themselves to a more welcoming ambiance. They are also easier for staff to monitor. Libraries built or expanded in city centers today typically adhere to Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles, and these best practices cannot be applied to a second-story buildout.

REINVESTMENT OPTION 3: NEW BUILD

HAPL has moved operations twice before and could conceivably do so again. Starting with a blank slate presents exciting opportunities not otherwise possible given existing constraints. It also brings drawbacks. They include forfeiture of a riverfront plot beloved by many and, of course, the daunting task of finding and securing both a new site and the level of capital funding needed to do it justice.

Consultant Note: As already noted, Hudson and surrounding St. Croix County communities are growing at a steady clip. It is difficult to overstate how this demographic reality will further strain library spaces and services already judged by community members (and Library Strategies) to be pinched or worse.

With that said, this growth rate – coupled with geographic service area limitations and ongoing funding considerations – does not justify reconceptualizing HAPL as a multi-branch system and expanding operations through a *second* full-service, brick-and-mortar branch location (i.e. a satellite branch *additional* to the First Street flagship). This means, by extension, that the City is facing a binary choice: keep and improve the existing Library, or move operations entirely to a new location.

Detailed exploration around the identification and evaluation of alternate sites falls outside the bounds of the current consultant assessment project. However, it bears noting that community stakeholders with a vantage point on the issue and options in play nearly all independently specified the same strategic intersection: Carmichael Road & Vine Street.

Naturally, further research would be needed to test prevailing assumptions and determine the viability of this alternate locus for Hudson’s library services. For present purposes, the relocation benefits and disadvantages listed here are drafted with the Carmichael & Vine location in mind. However, most of the same arguments would also hold true for alternative sites as well.

Advantage 3.1: Parcel and Building Size: The library expansion options available to the City at the current HAPL location cannot provide the full square footage needed to address current pain points or account for continued, inevitable population growth. In contrast, a new and larger build on an alternative site would allow HAPL to expand with interior spaces that fully address the varied needs outlined on pages 10-15. These needs include:

- a large, dedicated programming space (equipped with a strong A/V setup)
- expanded square footage for the book ranges and accent shelving needed to house/display more physical materials and meaningfully improve the Library’s collections
- increased storage for staff needs and nontraditional collections, including Library of Things
- several bookable, sound-proofed, conference room style meeting rooms (recommended space allocation of 25 sq. ft. per seat)
- expanded blend of seating (reading and studying) areas for patrons (mix of table, lounge and carrel style seating, averaging to 30 sq. ft. per seat)
- an expanded, more versatile children’s area (ideally equipped with a permanent exhibit space and sensory-friendly zone)

This list is not exhaustive but reflects probable priorities based on under-met community needs.

Advantage 3.2: Floorplan Configuration: As a retrofitted office building, the current HAPL facility is a less-than-ideal nexus for library service. In contrast, a new build on a comparatively uncomplicated site allows an architect to design a library that adheres to best practices for the industry. Gains will include a blueprint that is less disjointed, more navigable, and far better aligned with patron usage patterns and staff workflows than in the current facility. Principles of note include:

- single-story floor plan to maximize construction budget, gain operational efficiencies, and allow for greatest possible visitor accessibility
- clear delineation and ample spacing between adult-, teen- and children/family- oriented sections of the library
- an open, well-lit ambiance designed around CPTED principles; clear sightlines for staff and patrons; intuitive separations between all staff and public areas

This is only a sampling of modern public library design principles judged by the consulting team to be most relevant to HAPL’s particular situation and fiction points. For a more holistic, complete primer on library configuration best practices, Library Strategies recommends *The Practical Handbook of Library Architecture: Creating Building Spaces that Work*, by Fred Schlipft and John A. Moorman (2018); and *Public Library Buildings: The Librarians’ Go-To Guide for Construction, Expansion, and Renovation Projects* by Lisa Charbonnet (2015).

Advantage 3.3: Ample Parking: Simply put, on-site parking is by far the single most frequent (and often, the single most vexing) complaint aired by residents as part of this study. No capital reinvestment option short of removal to a new location will be sufficient to supply HAPL “one parking spot per 500 square feet of interior building space” – the benchmark recommended in the Wisconsin Public Library Standards and endorsed by Library Strategies.

Advantage 3.4: Outdoor Spaces: Despite its location opposite the riverfront and the view this affords from some areas of the building, HAPL’s present location does not in practice afford versatile outdoor spaces. Central libraries in similar communities often boast outside amenities for seasonal use: a gazebo or modest garden for reading and socializing, green space for outdoor story times and other such programming, etc. On its current city block, no such expansions are possible. In contrast, construction at the more expansive plot at Carmichael & Vine would allow for civic assets of that sort (predominantly but not necessarily exclusively for the Library’s use.)

Advantage 3.5: Viable Options: Hudson faces a situation with plenty of precedent from cities of similar size and character. Unfortunately for many such communities, the realization that a new and more suitable library “home” is essential comes only *after* all greenfield sites and other easily developed parcels are claimed for other purposes. In contrast, the Hudson city limits still contain serviceable plots that would not require expensive teardown pre-work or design-related compromises based on plot and zoning obstacles.

Consultant interviews and other community conversations drew particular focus to the County-owned parcel at the intersection of Carmichael & Vine. St. Croix County has zoned this land for future public buildings, and it is already within easy access to water and sewer infrastructure investments built to service the new Hudson Medical Center.

Advantage 3.6: New Neighbors: “New build” libraries planned today are often sited within easy walking distance of (in some cases, even co-located with) other high-traffic public facilities. These include community centers, destination parks, sports complexes, and in particular schools. While the First Street location offers some adjacencies (Lakefront Park and debatably Willow River Elementary), the Carmichael & Vine location offers more: Grandview Park, the St. Croix County government complex, and above all Hudson Prairie Elementary School and Hudson Middle School. It is also within easy walking distance of Hudson High School. Furthermore, although it is membership-based, the nearby YMCA warrants mention here due to Hudson’s lack of a publicly run community center. These proximities would stoke library foot traffic and prove conducive to beneficial community partnerships.

Disadvantage 3.1: Unsocialized Message: On a surface level, most Hudson residents are content with – or at least accustomed to – the idea of a downtown library location. It has simply always been that way. Moreover, the riverfront views make the current location feel like a premium spot (a point of view reinforced by HAPL’s successful “Your Home on the River” branding). By extension, many residents will not be immediately enthusiastic about (and some will be outright hostile to) a proposal to relocate the Library to a new part of town.

In practice, those initial, favorable perceptions about location are usually overshadowed by the reality of the current space: a small, cramped building, vexing parking situation, and concomitant limitations to the library visitation experience. While this can only be said definitively about the focus groups and other deeper conversations conducted by Library Strategies, it feels logical to extrapolate that to the community more generally.

Phrased another way, the “normality” and necessity of a downtown location are broadly taken for granted. It would require an active, sustained public awareness campaign to make residents aware of the myriad benefits associated with a new site – starting with but not limited to the possibility of a markedly larger building.

Disadvantage 3.2: Price Variables / Overall Cost: Capital reinvestments on the scale of new construction initiatives naturally come with a substantial price tag. Contrary to perception, building costs *per square foot* are not necessarily significantly higher for new builds than for expansion projects at an existing facility. However, the sheer scale of new construction – coupled with site acquisition and prep costs – makes this the most expensive improvement path of the three under discussion. In a generally fiscally cautious funding climate like that currently found in Hudson, the price tag for such a large-scale project will be closely scrutinized – and so requires methodical prework.

As a point of illustration, consider this table of averaged 2023 expenses provided by a Midwest-based architect.¹⁰

Refresh (paint, carpet, etc.) cost per square foot: \$65-80

Renovation cost per square foot: \$120-150

Expansion cost per square foot (ground level): \$280-320

Expansion cost per square foot (second level): \$300-340

Construction or new build per square foot: \$360-400

While only a rough accounting of construction costs as they are incurred today, this breakdown illustrates that new construction in the public sector is a costly endeavor and, on balance, requires a larger capital budget than is required for less extensive remodeling and expansion projects.

¹⁰ Source: Angus-Young Architects/Engineers (provided Fall 2023). Breakdowns are estimated and do not take into account inflationary factors between now and year of ground-breaking, contingency budgeting considerations, or localized factors.

SHORT- AND LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

As this report and the community engagement underpinning it make clear, the City of Hudson is nearing an important crossroads. In its current incarnation, the Hudson Area Public Library is demonstrably small and increasingly inadequate to the community's expressed needs. There is no low-cost or easy path forward, and any of the three expansion pathways examined by the consultants would require years and multiple phases of work to actualize.

In spite of the ambiguity around *if*, *how*, and *when* the City will reinvest in the Library – and indeed, partly because of it – Library Strategies wishes to offer HAPL recommendations for next steps. These long-range suggestions are not strictly tied to any of the several expansion options explored in pages 17-24. Rather, these are practices which better equip the Library for success *regardless* of what comes next. Library Strategies terms these “long-term recommendations.”

However, short-term recommendations are also necessary. Even under the most favorable of conditions, expansion of a public facility or construction of a new one represents a multi-year undertaking. Obviously, this necessarily long timetable does not negate the need for the Library to fulfill its mission and deliver library services over the interim period.

With this in mind, Library Strategies also wishes to offer facility and operational changes which could be implemented with a considerably shorter turnaround.

Short-Term Recommendations

The following recommendations are exactly that: recommendations. It is not expected that library leadership will investigate all – or implement all that they do choose to explore.

Each is put forward by the consultants as a strategy to alleviate spatial constraints identified over the course of this project. However, it must be underscored that these are essentially stopgap or band aid measures calibrated to help HAPL make the most of its limiting physical footprint *over the short term*. They are not substitutes for a capital reinvestment in facilities.

- 1. South Entrance:** Consider reconfiguring the south entrance. Currently, patrons walk straight north into the building, then turn east and face the staircase upon entry. If the entrance retained a straight path, patrons would encounter the service desk when they enter; and the elevator would be more conspicuous.
- 2. Lobby Stage:** While imperfect, the ground-level lobby will remain HAPL's largest programming space for the foreseeable future. Given the necessity of utilizing this area for children's events, it may be prudent for staff to reallocate the strategic area now occupied by A/V materials to housing a small, versatile stage. This investment would be further enhanced through acquisition of bench seating on wheels (for adults) [\[example\]](#) and a bulk purchase of carpet squares (for children). If the entryway is reoriented, per above, a semi-mobile “stage area” could also be established in that corner.

3. **Friends Bookstore:** Consider relocating the permanent Friends of the Library bookstore to the ground floor area currently occupied by A/V materials. This is a customary set-up in many public libraries, as it allows the passive sales display to attract passersby who might not otherwise be acquainted with the store or carve time to browse the shelves. This location is also convenient to a permanent staff station for payment. (As an acknowledged drawback, this reshuffling would dislocate the bookstore from the Friends office.)
4. **Repurpose Bookstore Space:** Relocation of the bookstore frees up a valuable, versatile, semi-private space for other library functions. Options include a further meeting room, since spaces of that kind are consistently in high demand, or incorporation into an expanded teen zone. In the latter case, teen materials could be relocated to this room. (At present, some browsers judge the YA collections to be hard to locate.)
5. **Library of Things:** HAPL's growing collection of loanable nontraditional items is popular among some patrons but completely unknown to others. Consider advertising the Library of Things prominently through improved signage and/or displays. It may also be possible to move at least a portion of this collection to the lobby to attract the attention of passersby.
6. **CDs and DVDs:** Make a long-term plan for paring back the amount of space required to display DVDs and especially CDs. Downsizing of these collections should not outpace circulation trends, but over several years it is likely that weeding and selective acquisition practices can condense the footprint currently required for these physical media.
7. **Optimize Balconies:** In its marketing, HAPL accentuates its connection to and views of the St. Croix River. Many residents also appreciate the proximity, at least in the abstract. In practice, the building's balconies are underutilized. Patrons should be encouraged to use them both. This can be done through explicit signage and welcoming but weather-resistant furnishings.
8. **Second-Floor Service Desks:** In the present configuration, HAPL maintains two second floor staff points close to the stairs and to one another. The service desk on the east side is devoted to children's service and its counterpart to adult service. Consider consolidating both service points at the current children's desk, which is well situated relative to the children's activities area so as to monitor the top of the stairs. The square feet currently occupied by a dedicated adult services desk could be repurposed any number of ways. For instance, the area could be reconceptualized as an extension of the Local History Room and used for a rotation of local history or genealogy displays.
9. **Library Kitchen:** HAPL is fortunate to have a kitchen area, an amenity which ranks high on the "wish list" of many public libraries. Equipment upgrades would enhance the space and allow the Library to seek novel partnerships with restaurants and other area businesses. Pilot efforts like these could greatly increase HAPL's profile as an innovative and collaborative player in the community.

10. **Second-Floor Windows:** While the building’s large windows and views they afford are a chief attraction of the space in the minds of some, others report that the resulting glare hurts their eyes. This is not an uncommon problem and can be ameliorated through an investment in electric shades or ultraviolet screen protectors.
11. **Exterior Program Space:** While the Library benefits from attractive landscaping, the modest size of HAPL’s plot and presence of sidewalks precludes the Library from conducting activities outdoors on its own property. As an alternative, consider approaching The Phipps Center about making periodic, seasonal use of its north lawn (i.e. the grassy knoll opposite HAPL on Vine Street).

Long-Term Recommendations

1. **Create a Building Program:** In the parlance of public space planners and architects, a “building program” is a pre-development exercise used to capture the functional and spatial needs of the project under consideration. It is standard for new construction, but is equally instructive for renovations.

Library space planner John A. Moorman makes the argument well: “In all conversion situations, one of the major problems involves the building shaping the library, rather than the library shaping the building. If too many of the basic functional needs of libraries are compromised by limitations imposed by existing spaces, the result is at best dysfunction and at worst an amazing waste of money.”¹¹

A well-researched, well-written building program is a practical check against this possibility. It is also a useful tool for securing buy-in from City leaders who do not fully appreciate everything the Library does, how those services translate to physical space, and why the existing space is a daily challenge.

This need not be done from scratch. Reference building programs are available for libraries sized 30,000 sq. ft., 40,000 sq. ft., and many points in between. Samples can be found online or through industry publications like the two books cited in the footnotes on this page.¹² Specific to Wisconsin, HAPL management should pay particular attention to pre-built Space Needs worksheets maintained as part of the Wisconsin Public Library Standards [\[here\]](#), as well as the relatively new Wisconsin Library Buildings & Spaces portal maintained by Southeastern Wisconsin Libraries (SEWI) [\[here\]](#).

¹¹ Schlipf, Fred & Moorman, John. *The Practical Handbook of Library Architecture: Creating Building Spaces that Work*. American Library Association Editions, 2018.

¹² Charbonnet, Lisa. *Public Library Buildings: The Librarian's Go-To Guide for Construction, Expansion, and Renovation Projects*. Libraries Unlimited, 2015.

HAPL's completed building plan will doubtless include the spaces bulleted on Pages 10-15, but will also sketch out the square footage, relative positioning, fixtures, and furnishings associated with each section of the library.

- 2. Establish a Building Planning Committee.** Trustees are instrumental as champions for the Library and as conduits for relaying vital information to City leadership. However, an initiative as multi-dimensional, expensive, and impactful as the complete overhaul of the community's library requires a broader coalition of supporters.

As a means to that end, the Board of Trustees should establish and recruit for a "Building Planning Committee" (or working group) to spearhead the research, public advocacy, fundraising, and other stakeholder engagement necessary to shepherd through this long-term investment in the community.

Idealized composition for such a group might include representation from:

- ✓ Library Board of Trustees
- ✓ Hudson Area Library Foundation and Friends of the Hudson Area Library leadership
- ✓ Local business community
- ✓ Other community opinion leaders (preferably representing outlying areas as well as the City of Hudson)

While the member roster is sure to see additions and turnover, this group's purpose and guiding charter will remain fixed. Early and principal goals include 1) the identification and greenlighting of a specific expansion plan, and 2) an exploration of the funding mechanisms available to realize that plan.

- 3. Determine expansion plan.** It is difficult to estimate, let alone pinpoint, project costs without first knowing the site (if relocated) or manner (if remodeled) of construction.

In addition to design and construction costs, that ultimate price tag may include land acquisition, demolition, or remediation expenses. Moreover, architects cannot draw up complete and viable building plans without first knowing plot acreage, dimensions, and variance. Naturally, these major unknowns hamper a library's ability to explore public or private funding at anything more than a surface level.

As a point of departure, Hudson Area Public Library and its Building Committee need clarity from the City of Hudson on the fate of the soon-to-be-vacated Hudson Police Department premises. Competing interests and alternate plans for this prime real estate may directly impact how the Library proceeds.

4. **Identify funding channels.** Realizing public construction/renovation on this scale requires careful financial planning. It will be necessary for the Building Committee, with the support from the trustees, to determine funding channels and conditions. With few exceptions, library buildings today require all three of the following:

A. Local Funding: Whether through a city-wide referendum or the reassignment of an existing tax, a new library will not take shape without public support over and above the library's yearly operating budget. Local funding sources are the bedrock for library construction and a prerequisite for the pursuit of supplemental financing.

B. State Funding: Grants and other financing support may be available from State sources. Examples include the Grants for Local Projects Program administered by the Wisconsin Department of Administration, which provides support for public facilities and related infrastructure, as well as from federal Library Services & Technology Act (LSTA) funds administered through the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. It falls to the Building Committee to explore such options.

C. Private Support: In today's environment, library rebuilds accomplished without support from the private sector are the exception rather than the rule. On average, this private support accounts for $\geq 15\%$ of the total project budget.

Most of that subtotal (80-90%) comes from so-called major donors – defined as individuals, families, corporations, and foundations. Unfortunately, but unavoidably, this funding reality means that communities with a robust philanthropic community and strong giving culture are at a distinct advantage over communities that do not boast these characteristics.

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that Hudson would start such a campaign from a position of relative strength. As a mechanism for determining a community's capacity and willingness to give at this scale and to this specific cause, building committees typically turn to a feasibility study. Conducted by an outside consultant who is an expert in fundraising forecasting, these 3–4-month projects lean on one-on-one interviews (focused on residents of "influence or affluence") to gauge what level of private support a new library can reasonably expect.

APPENDICES

A: Community Survey Report

B: 1:1 Interviews Summary

C: Focus Groups Summary

LIBRARY STRATEGIES





**Hudson Area Public Library
Community Survey: Executive Summary**

BACKGROUND

From March to May 2024, Library Strategies partnered with Hudson Area Public Library (HAPL) on a broad-based facility and community needs assessment. As part of a multi-pronged community engagement phase of work, Library Strategies crafted an online community survey.

This questionnaire aimed to capture satisfaction with and perceptions of the public institution as it exists today, and to pinpoint unmet or undermet needs. Data shared for – and trends uncovered by – this survey influenced topics probed in the focus group step of community engagement activities (conducted the week of March 4). Survey input also directly informs many of the LSCG consulting team’s short- and long-term recommendations for HAPL.

In total, **940** residents participated in the 19-question questionnaire. This more than doubled the consulting team’s stated goal of 400 completed response sets. That turnout is especially impressive when considered against the size of the community. According to library service data maintained by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, HAPL’s legal service area is 34,097 as of the 2021 reporting period. Put another way, an impressive 2.7% of residents eligible to participate in the survey did so (exceeding the Library Strategies client average).

High response rates notwithstanding, the broad distribution strategies employed preclude a truly “scientific” analysis of data. Nevertheless, we believe such a large respondent pool allows us to extrapolate trends and perceptions with reasonable accuracy.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The following areas of concern or other takeaways emerged repeatedly, usually across more than one question:

- Most survey-takers report that they are at least “somewhat satisfied” with the current, downtown location of the Library. However, many also posit that the current physical footprint is too small to meet their families’ needs (for meeting and study spaces, programs and classes, physical collections, children’s and teen amenities, and more).
- For a community its size, Hudson is lacking in no-cost “third place” spaces that are welcoming to all. HAPL manages to partially fill some of those unmet needs, but cannot realistically do more given its spatial limitations.
- HAPL coordinates a superb program slate, particularly relative to its resources. However, space-related issues within the facility (including the lack of a purpose-built large programming space) represent a friction point for patrons and a practical check on how much the Library can expand on this strength.
- Parking represents an even bigger flashpoint for discontent. Convenient parking is at a premium, particularly during busy periods at HAPL (or downtown more generally).
- From an *operations* standpoint, HAPL earns a strong report card from the community. Patrons rave about staff and all they are able to accomplish with finite means. Outlying elements of note include hours of operation; ebook availability and loan periods; the HAPL website and MORE catalog; the Library’s self-checkout machine and process; and promotion around the Library of Things. These may merit a fresh look by HAPL management but are not nearly as concerning as the underlying space challenges.

LIBRARY USAGE + DEMOGRAPHICS

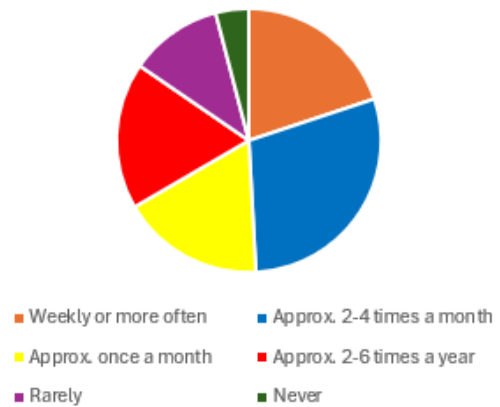
Half of the 940 respondents (49.2%) self-report visiting HAPL more than once a month, and so can safely be termed *regular users*. Conversely, 15.4% of survey-takers reported that they “Never” or “Rarely” visit.

Participation rates are reasonably even among generational cohorts, excepting those aged ≤ 29 , who represent a collective 8% of the respondent set.

Respondents are fairly evenly distributed across the service area covered by HAPL. When mapped against the Hudson School District’s six elementary schools, between 15-22% of survey respondents reside closest to each (with the sole exception of Houlton Elementary, which is closest to just 54 survey-takers – or 7.8% of those who responded).

The data skews female, with men accounting for just over 20% of respondents. Fifty eight percent of respondents come from households with no children. Approximately a third (29.1%) represent homes where *more than one* minor is present.

Visit Frequency



QUESTION-BY-QUESTION BREAKDOWNS

Note: Question-by-question breakdowns are in some cases reordered, and in others joined together, for best flow and minimal redundancy.

If you rarely or never visit the library, why not? [Q2]

When asked why they do not visit the Library, nonusers and sporadic users cited finding what they need online as the most common reason why (41%, 50 ct.). Interestingly, older patrons are nearly as likely as younger ones to make this claim. As a close second, 37.7% (46 ct.) report an ability and preference to purchase their own books (or other materials).

Rounding out the list of reasons, 27.9% (34 ct.) assert that they simply don't see a *need* to visit the Library; 17.2% (21 ct.) express that the parking situation makes visiting too challenging; and 11.5% (14 ct.) of respondents don't have a library card.

Note: A further 13.9% of survey-takers report utilizing the Library, but *only* for its online resources, and so self-identified as sporadic or nonusers for the purposes of the survey.

In the last two years, for what reasons have you visited the library? [Q3]

A preponderance of survey respondents visit the Library for traditional, transactional reasons. Seventy-six percent (688 ct.) check out physical materials, and 61.5% (552 ct.) utilize the Library's holds system and pick-up shelves.

Also high among the offerings listed on the survey, and in descending order, patrons report using the Library: to attend a children's storytime, program or event (26.4%, 237 ct.); to read or study (19.1%, 172 ct.); to attend or hold a meeting not sponsored by the library (15.7%, 141 ct.); to collaborate or socialize with others (13.4%, 120 ct.); and to utilize HAPL's print, copy, scanning and fax capabilities (12.5%, 112 ct.)

Note: A cross-analysis within SurveyMonkey finds no statistically significant difference in these habits between generational cohorts.

In addition, 122 respondents took the opportunity to expand the list provided with free-form answers. From that additional information, two further key usage patterns emerge. Many survey-takers, and particularly those who report visiting at least several times a month, (1) tout the children's play area and amenities and/or (2) routinely browse the permanent Friends of the Library bookstore space on the second floor.

How satisfied are you with the following aspects of Library operations? [Q4]

How satisfied are you with various aspects of Library collections/resources? [Q5]

How satisfied are you with HAPL's programmatic offerings and outreach efforts? [Q6]

When considered with Q11 (summarized separately below), feedback on these three questions offers a high level but meaningful "report card" on the Library's overall performance as judged by the public.

With a survey sample set this size, Library Strategies flags areas that meet or pass the 5% threshold for dissatisfaction, and is most interested in areas that exceed the 10% yardstick. Between Q4-Q6, survey-takers rated 34 aspects of HAPL ranging from book selection, to perceived safety, to general cleanliness. "Opt outs" notwithstanding, a majority of survey respondents report being satisfied with (or simply personally indifferent towards) each of the elements listed.

None even approaches the 10% threshold for dissatisfaction. Moreover, only one of these items, e-books, garnered a dissatisfaction rate above the 5% benchmark (3.42% somewhat dissatisfied + 1.91% very dissatisfied). This quantitative data speaks highly of HAPL and its staff's ability to serve the community remarkably well even when hampered by finite space and other limiting means.

Nevertheless, the 406 comments volunteered in the open-ended portions of these three questions make clear that survey-takers see room for improvements. Predominant themes are as follows:

- **Hours:** A noteworthy portion of respondents, particularly parents, express a desire to see some expansion in open hours. Some focus their wishes on weekend (particularly Sunday) access. Others are more interested in weekday access before 10 a.m. (with 9 a.m. regularly cited as the optimal time for doors to open).
- **Self-Checkouts:** Patrons recount negative experiences with a self-checkout machine frequently described as prone to malfunction and breakage. There is also a desire for at least one additional terminal to expedite the self-checkout process.
- **Website / MORE:** Although only 3.24% of survey-takers marked dissatisfaction with HAPL's website, it is clear from open-ended comments that many are hindered by the navigability (or lack thereof) of the site. Others express frustration with the operability of the MORE catalog interface.
- **E-books:** Users of e-materials are frustrated by wait periods which they feel are inordinately long, coupled with a reading window that feels pinched. Some also express a desire for greater breadth in the titles available, though the latter concern comes across as of secondary importance.
- **Library of Things:** Patrons who know about and have utilized the Library of Things (LOT) rave about the nontraditional loans on offers. Tellingly, however, a near-equal number of respondents took this opportunity to express surprise that these amenities were available through HAPL. Ostensibly, the LOT is not presently among HAPL's better advertised collections.

Which library services are currently important to you and your family? [Q7] Which services do you expect to be important to you or your family in five years? [Q8]

It is valuable to pair and contrast these questions. While the first is straightforward, the second probes patrons’ aspirations and reasonable guesses about their families’ evolving needs as they will look in half a decade. As a rule of thumb, Library Strategies flags any +/- ≥10% difference for closer review.

Critically, interest in *none* of the 20 areas probed is forecasted to “slacken” appreciably over the next five years. Only four of these show any decrease whatsoever, and all these are a modest ≥ 5% decline. In contrast, patrons forecast at least some increased desire/need for the remaining 16 services.

Three of these hit and surpass the +/- ≥10% threshold:

- At present, 48.7% (369 ct.) of respondents indicate that they use ebooks and e-audiobooks. By 2029, a further 13.5% (or 62.2% of the total) anticipate using those resources.
- As of today, 34.7% (263 ct.) of survey-takers take advantage of adult programming opportunities. If patrons’ own expectations hold true, that figure will rise to 48.2% (359 ct.) by the five-year mark.
- Last, 15.6% (118 ct.) of participants indicated that teen and tween services are important to their household. That ratio rises to 25.6% (191 ct.) when forecasting future need for those amenities. [This is a trend common to the majority of communities where Library Strategies polls, and can be attributed partly to parents who can easily conceptualize their young children “growing into” library programming geared towards teen/tween audiences.]

If the Library were to add these proposed services and amenities, how likely would you be to make use of them? (Think about your own usage habits, rather than what you suspect others would enjoy.) [Q9-10]

Respondents had the opportunity to express interest or indifference to a select list of prospective Library offerings (i.e. amenities proposed but not currently offered). They did so on a weighted Likert scale ranging from Very *Unlikely* [To Use]” (1) to “Very *Likely* [To Use]” (5). While an optional question, 739 respondents (78% of the total) took the opportunity to respond.

Weighted averages for all are as follows:

Service	% Dissatisfied
Coffee/refreshments available	3.20
Large event space for community use	2.89
24-7 lockers throughout the community for pickups/returns	2.76
Activity space for seniors	2.60
Classes for job skills + basic technology	2.14
Early literacy education for parents	1.96

Q11: Rate your satisfaction with these various aspects of the library’s CURRENT PHYSICAL SPACE on First Street.

This question probed satisfaction with 13 different aspects of HAPL’s facility. As with Q4-6, it is most useful to concentrate on areas where 10%+ of survey-takers expressed dissatisfaction (with secondary emphasis on areas that logged between 5-10% dissatisfaction).

Feature	% Dissatisfied
Parking	33.51%
Overall size	12.02%
Lobby as program space	8.54%
Spatial layout	8.28%
Reading and study areas	6.94%
Meeting rooms	6.41%
Children’s area	5.48%
Lobby / social areas	5.47%

Eight out of the 13 markers surpassed that 5% marker of dissatisfaction, pointing to commonplace patron challenges. By a large margin, parking is the single most significant flashpoint for discontent. Building size is also an issue, both on its face and when considering the repercussions of finite square footage on the various functions and zones that comprise a public library.

However, dominant sentiments are not uniformly negative. Interestingly, nearly 85% of survey-takers report that they are at least “somewhat satisfied” with the current, downtown location of the Library. By comparison, far fewer view the location as objectionable on its face. Even so, for a constrained library like HAPL, questions around location and size are intrinsically linked (*see below*).

Q12: Please expand on your rank choice for LOCATION and OVERALL SIZE. What observations, experiences or needs inform your answer?

When invited to weigh in on the size and site of HAPL, survey respondents fall broadly into two camps. One subset is comprised of advocates for the downtown, riverfront location – together with the adjacencies and purported efficiencies it offers. The other is actively inconvenienced by the present location, feel it confers no special advantages, or are largely indifferent on the location question so long as library services and standards meet their expectations.

Proponents for a downtown library are universally in favor of retaining the current plot and building on First Street as the nexus of library services for the Hudson area. Predominant reasons cited include the following:

- A riverfront library is a locus for civic pride and draws residents downtown;
- A downtown library is convenient for those within walking distance, as well as other residents who have frequent business/errands downtown;
- HAPL feels like an anchor to a de facto cultural or recreational corridor (when paired with The Phipps Center in the former case and the park and beachfront in the latter).

Interestingly, many (almost a majority) of the survey-takers who voiced support for retaining the Library's current footprint *also proactively mention* the challenges or shortcomings inherent in the location. Comments regularly hinge around a literal or implied *but* ("I love the downtown location, but...")

- "I love the location... but the children's area is often really busy and could use more space."
- "The location is good, but the parking feels a bit messy."
- "The location is excellent with the view of the river as background... but seems a little cramped and could use more space for programs."
- "Location is amazing but more space is needed."
- "Library is right on the river and close to downtown, but it's so small inside. I feel it could be bigger and have more room for books and other activities."
- "I love the location, I just wish it was much, much bigger with more options for books and program space."
- "Love the location... two floors is a bit awkward with most books being upstairs... and the lobby gets very tight with big programs."
- "While I like the building and location, it feels cramped and meeting rooms are small and booked up in advance."

This is just a representative sampling of such comments.

The other major camp, (hinted at elsewhere in this survey but outlined most clearly through Q12,) is comprised of residents who posit that the in-built strengths of HAPL's location are likely outweighed by the limitations and other challenges which 1st Street poses.

- Parking spaces are at a premium, and parking is a perennial challenge.
 - That situation is exacerbated by inclement weather conditions, during popular library programs, and when other city "happenings" create extra competition for street parking.
 - The incline on Vine Street is a point for anxiety among some.
 - A walk of two blocks or more is a particular imposition on families with young children and patrons experiencing mobility challenges.
- Downtown is not "central" for Hudson, and not convenient for a significant proportion of patrons. It is also not the only commercial corridor for shopping and professional services.

When assessing an existing facility, opinions and concerns around *location* cannot be separated entirely from questions of *space* and *size*. That is certainly in evidence here. Advocates for relocating the library overwhelmingly cite perceived gains to be had in terms of space – or call out the reverse, the dearth of space at the existing premises. (The many pinch points experienced by patrons due to limited space are detailed elsewhere in this write-up.)

In point of fact, this is an area where both “camps” obviously agree.

Significantly, although Q12 was structured as an *open-ended* query, meaning respondents could employ any words they wished, the same descriptors appeared with great frequency. For example, a full ten percent of respondents refer to the library as “small.” Three percent describe it as “crowded,” and another two percent label it “cramped.” Hundreds of other survey-takers voice similar sentiments using other language.

Q12: What additional or enhanced features, amenities or services would you like to see the Library provide? Feel free to “think big.” Q13. How else could your satisfaction with library services or resources be improved?

Suggestions offered run a wide gamut, but several commonalities emerge (and are echoed elsewhere in the questionnaire).

- 1. Outdoor spaces:** While the Library is located in a picturesque corner of downtown, there are few ways to actually enjoy that view from the public premises. Survey-takers express interest in investments ranging from a gazebo, to shaded reading nooks, to a community garden with places to sit.
- 2. Large, dedicated programming space:** Patrons who have experienced HAPL programs are acutely aware of the existing library’s space constraints. There is a broad desire for a dedicated (and perhaps configurable) programming space on the property.
- 3. Cozy interior reading spaces:** Patrons crave accessible, “lounge like” spaces to read, study, and/or conduct business or personal tasks on personal devices. Some such spaces already exist but are at a premium and also lack the desired ambiance.
- 4. Fill the “third place” deficit:** For a community its size, Hudson is lacking in no-cost “third place” spaces that are welcoming to all. In particular, and unlike other area communities, the City maintains neither a community center nor a senior center. While a library cannot be a true and full substitute for those civic assets, there is broad interest in HAPL incorporating services and opportunities typically offered by those centers (ex., expanded senior programming, wellness classes, cooking demonstrations).
- 5. Expanded kids’ zone:** Parents appreciate all HAPL does for its youngest patrons, particularly since Hudson is relatively light on accessible enrichment and no-cost entertainment options for young families. However, most feel that the children’s area is pinched for room and could be improved in various ways – if interior space was not such an impediment.



HUDSON AREA PUBLIC LIBRARY
1:1 Interviews: Executive Summary

NOTE: HAPL leadership and the project steering committee identified ten candidates to be the subject of one-on-one interviews with the lead consultants. Library Strategies provided selection criteria to guide this decision-making. In general, the consultants recommended reserving this more time-intensive engagement strategy for community members who bring some “outsized” knowledge about the library, its history, or some facet of the community in which it operates.

Each interview included some broad “core” questions, together with follow-up questions that took into account that person’s particular areas of expertise. For comfort and maximum candor, the moderators assured interviewees that comments would not be attributed back to specific individuals.

What follows are key themes and other vital takeaways as expressed by interview subjects across multiple one-on-one meetings.

Perspectives and ideas as presented here do not necessarily reflect the beliefs or recommendations of the Library Strategies consulting team. Consultants did not independently corroborate statistics or other information presented as facts by interview subjects unless specifically noted.

About the Community

- By many metrics, Hudson is the fastest growing community in Wisconsin. However, recent population growth has been “uneven” in important respects.
- Hudson and outlying areas are particularly attractive to older households.
- Starter homes in Hudson run in the \$400-450k range (\$350-\$450k for twin homes) and the most typical move-in demographic is 55-67 years.
- Hudson’s student population is down by approximately 150 students, in spite of the area’s overall growth trajectory. This is raising concerns in the education community.
- The Town of St. Joseph is another illustrative example. Starter homes routinely fall in the \$400k category and are situated on large lots. This price point is great for certain demographics and lifestyles (ex. telecommuters) but not inviting to young families. As a result, the local elementary school is struggling with a marked decrease in enrollment.
- Hudson has three robust industrial complexes and a generally strong economy – courtesy also of retail and restaurants both downtown and along the I-94 corridor.

- St. Croix County does not maintain infrastructure to absorb incoming immigrants. The possibility of some future influx is regularly discussed by both the County Board and City Council.
- Residents are mixed in their shopping habits. Some make it a priority to patronize downtown merchants. Others prefer big box stores and/or other commercial establishments farther east – due to proximity to their home, hassles associated with going downtown, or other factors. Many residents also frequently or periodically travel to Woodbury for shopping because Minnesota, unlike Wisconsin, does not charge sales tax on clothing purchase.
- Hudson is civically minded and, to a large degree, this mentality cuts across age cohorts. This can be seen in the Hudson Area Chamber of Commerce’s ongoing Leadership Hudson program for both current and emerging leaders.
- Community members care for each other and want the best for each citizen, but are ambivalent about whether Hudson should foster/embrace further growth.
- It’s hard to “break into” the community – not just from a financial perspective but also socially. Hudson needs more avenues of connection/dialogue between new families and long-established households.
- Hudson is more diverse than ever before (tied to overall population growth) but many choose not to acknowledge this diversity.
- Hudson families hold a lot of personal wealth.
- Although civic-minded, the community can also be short sighted when it comes to long-term investments that realize “dividends” over the course of many years.
- Community members broadly agree that they need a library, but there is little clarity, let alone consensus, around how any future improvements would be funded.
- Although residents want a lot from their city, many have unrealistic expectations about the degree to which private donor streams can foot the bill(s). Expenditure of public funds on a capital scale “raises an eyebrow.”
- With that said, the private wealth local to Hudson is an asset for any capital initiative – provided the messaging is correct and the ask is appropriate. Proof can be found in The Phipps Center for Arts, the hockey arena, and the YMCA.
- Long-range planning is effectively on hiatus (or at least moving slowly) until the City of Hudson’s new City Administrator is installed.
- Community members are largely blind to social issues in their midst – homelessness, lack of affordable housing, food insecurities, mental health concerns. These are broadly perceived as *Big City* problems, but the reality is not nearly so binary.

About the Library: Today

- On January 1, 2024, when the official split took effect, the City of Hudson took over funding the library.
- Dissolution of the joint library arrangement with the Village of North Hudson, Town of St. Joseph, and Town of Hudson is still fresh on the mind for many.
- Many residents do not realize how poorly the Library is funded relative to norms, needs, and peer institutions.
- HAPL is currently a lightning rod for community concern. Attention is split between funding questions and differing opinions regarding location (“stay or relocate”). If anything, the “stay” camp is the louder voice. They cite the iconic building with great views in a vibrant downtown core.
- Despite its recent governance difficulties, and maybe partly because of them, HAPL *does* have a broad coalition of support, though whether that support can be marshalled in support of a major funding initiative is another question.
- The City Council of Hudson wonders whether it is possible for the Library *Foundation* to purchase the library building and even be responsible for ongoing funding.
- Time and again, the Library Foundation has proven itself both committed to and vital to the health of HAPL.
- Library patrons living in the Village of North Hudson, Town of Hudson and the Town of St. Joseph need to understand that they now need to actually *check out items* when visiting the Library in order to support ongoing funding for HAPL through the County.
- Parking is an ongoing issue: both in terms of building accessibility for visitors with mobility issues, and also more generally (since all patrons contend with parking scarcity on busy days).
- In contrast, the City’s long history with library service is telling. Aside from the original Carnegie (built 100+ years ago), the Library is always assigned “leftover” buildings not custom-built for public service of this type or well matched to the community’s growth trajectory. Hudson could take this moment in its history to “step up” and do right by HAPL (or more to the point, the many residents who love and rely on it).
- The Library Foundation Board is strategic in its thinking. On balance, the Library Board is less long-range in its planning (partly due to factors that, at least until recently, have been largely outside of their control).
- The library staff is dedicated, flexible, steps up, is welcoming and is customer service orientated.
- Aside from its stellar staff, HAPL’s greatest strength is its programming.
- Unfortunately, the prevailing narrative is more about funding (past and future) than about programming, collection, services, and community impact.
- HAPL’s potential is hampered by the fact that it is housed in a facility retrofitted from a previous purpose (office complex).
- A library location next to the Phipps Center for the Arts creates a “cultural hub” along the river. People like this idea but do not routinely patronize them both in the course of the same trip downtown.

About the Library: Future

- Historically, there has not been sufficient “public will” to fund a truly great library. The City held onto its Carnegie location after it became untenable, then moved to a standing county facility and finally to a less-than-ideal office building.
- Time is of the essence. With the Hudson Police Department moving in about a year, now is the time to draw up a coalition of support behind some manner of capital reinvestment in the Library (whether or not that solution ultimately includes the HPD space).
- If the library wants a new site, management and staff need to talk *a lot* and talk *often* to the public about what they want and what it will allow. That is probably not a natural skill for frontline library staff.
- Don’t make the plan so grandiose that it is difficult for the community to conceptualize or unpalatable to consider funding.
- Demonstrate needs and show impacts. Don’t shy away from self-promotion.
- In its messaging around future improvements, the Library staff should not worry about statistics so much as a reasoned, rounded argument about what a better facility would actually *do* for Hudson. Intriguing examples include homework help, workforce development, telehealth, and kindergarten readiness.
- “No public official should decide about the Library [location] until they have visited and determined for themselves the impact it makes on the community.”
- The County-owned land at the corner of Vine Street and Carmichael Road is enticing for many reasons. The possibility for ample parking and interior space top the list, but that location also has other advantages.
- FYI: In recent memory, the County Board offered land on the corner of Vine & Carmichael to be used for a park and walking trails, but the City did not take advantage of that offer at that time.
- FYI: The County Board has zoned their land at Vine & Carmichael for future public buildings. The southwest corner has sewer and water, due to recent infrastructure work supporting construction of the Hudson Medical Center.
- A new library building would allow the community to craft a new beacon of civic pride. The current facility has curb appeal, but only when measured against the fact that it was not a library to begin with. “We can probably do better.”
- If a capital campaign is in the future, follow the example set by The Phipps and Hudson Hospital: prioritize finding competent, well-recognized community leaders who believe in the organization’s mission. That makes all the difference.
- Alternative view: Could the Library stay in its location and maintain its current size, but expand into neighborhoods with new outreach efforts – including even a bookmobile?

Community Members Interviewed:
Paul Berning
Laurie DeRosier
David Grambow
Meg Heaton
Joy S. Knudson
Clarence "Buck" Malik
Mary Claire Olson Potter
Jan & Daryl Standafer



HUDSON AREA PUBLIC LIBRARY
Focus Groups: Themes & Takeaways
March 4-7, 2024

NOTE: Focus group attendees were invited to participate in this exercise either (1) because of a recommendation from a member of the project’s steering committee or (2) at the suggestion of the HAPL director, who in turn sought suggestions from other community leaders not involved through the steering committee. See the end of this document for an alphabetized list of participants and which March roundtable they attended.

As each of these four sessions commenced, attendees were informed that their comments may be paraphrased (and in some cases typed verbatim) and would be shared in aggregate with library leadership at the conclusion of the assessment work. However, for comfort and maximum candor, the moderators assured participants that comments would not be attributable back to specific individuals. In rare cases where an exception seems warranted and a name is listed alongside a comment or suggestion, it is done with the express approval of that individual.

What follows are key themes and other vital takeaways as expressed by focus group attendees across multiple sessions. Opinions and topics that came up only in passing or did not gain traction are not represented here.

Perspectives and ideas as presented here do not necessarily reflect the beliefs or recommendations of the Library Strategies consulting team.

Moderator: Nick Dimassis MLIS
Note-taker: Melissa Brechon MLIS

About the Community:

- Hudson residents love their downtown and feel that it has a “Mayberry-esque” appeal. However, fairly few actually shop downtown with any regularity (as it is expensive and the goods on offer are limited). Much of the vibrancy comes from out-of-town visitors from Minnesota.
- For many others, Hudson is a bedroom community. Their workplaces and social activities are oriented around the Twin Cities, rather than western Wisconsin.
- Hudson’s chief appeal, as seen by residents, is in blending a small-town atmosphere with accessibility to the Twin Cities for work and errands.

- Few want Hudson to turn into Woodbury, although most admit to shopping there and to admiring its library.
- On balance, Hudson is a conservative area, and this sensibility extends beyond party partisanship and the issues in the headlines that day. People here simply don't like the local government telling them what to do or funding their local government at unnecessary levels.
- Hudson has a strong civic / volunteerism ethic. Service organizations like Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, and Operation Help do well here, and the area churches are proactive with identified needs.
- If someone asks for help (food, diapers, etc.) via social media, community members respond in generous but ad hoc ways.
- Hudson is not particularly diverse, but its character is changing steadily if viewed over a span of years. (For example, Hudson had a Pride Fest for the first time last year, and it was fairly well received.)
- The school district shows this diversity with 12-15 different languages spoken by students in the home.
- Many residents believe that recreational activities should be paid for from private funding streams, akin to how downtown businesses are so supportive of local sports teams.
- Hudson conspicuously lacks a recreation center – or a Parks & Recreation Department in the sense that the term is usually used. However, it does have a Community Education program. This all factors into public needs and expectations vis-à-vis the library.
- Hudson maintains no senior center. Agave Kitchen is one of several partial, informal solutions (though not known to all).
- Seniors who live “on the hill” have the resources to live in very expensive housing and can afford their own transportation to and from doctor appointments, etc. Seniors without those personal means might find it harder to thrive in Hudson.
- There is no public transit infrastructure to speak of. A new shared ride transit program is available. However, Uber is not allowed in the City.
- A defining characteristic is the price of housing, which starts around \$500k and routinely goes over \$1m.
- Hudson boasts a vibrant restaurant scene. Many of the service workers employed by this sector must live in and commute from other towns due to the high price of housing.
- Most don't see the poverty in their midst, but Hudson has real and demonstrable need. Thirty percent of households earn above the federal poverty level but less than what it costs to make ends meet in Hudson. This is corroborated by the United Way of Wisconsin's “ALICE” metrics (standing for “Asset Limited, Income Constrained, but Employed”).
- Hudson offers two food shelves, and the Hudson Area Backpack Program is popular.
- Those who are truly homeless do not have a shelter or other public space for gathering. They live in their cars or couch surf.
- HAPL is as well situated as any community institution to be a welcoming and versatile “third space” for residents.
- Little Free Libraries was “born” in Hudson. Does HAPL utilize this bragging right (and potential partnership) in any ways?

About the Library:

- Participants are familiar with and quite receptive to HAPL's branding as "Your Home on the River," an intentional campaign to accentuate the Library's current downtown location.
- The public likes that their Library is close to The Phipps, but few report "doubling up" by patronizing both over the course of the same trip. In practice, that is impractical.
- HAPL is a central part of the community but the location is inconvenient (at least relatively speaking) for neighborhoods farther east / farther from the river.
- Parking is an even greater frustration. Spots are hard to nab and impossible to guarantee. Seniors and others with mobility concerns must also navigate a lot that feels uneven and a walk that often starts some distance from the nearest entrance.
- Meeting rooms are always booked, to the point that some would-be users no longer view those spaces as a viable option/solution to their needs.
- Study spaces are likewise at a premium. Some potential study rooms are currently used as storage – something attendees both understand and find frustrating.
- Room for collections feels pinched, and this is reflected in the breadth of resources on offer. Patrons feel they are reliant on the MORE catalog and interlibrary loan more than they should need to be.
- Load-bearing floors are another contributing factor, though understandably this contributing factor is not obvious to all visitors.
- Programming is an even bigger space concern. Events are usually high quality and draw well, but this makes for an uncomfortable experience in the lobby – and an even worse experience for visitors who are at HAPL for unrelated reasons.
- The building has a kitchen and should consider using it for cooking demonstrations, classes or similar, fun offerings.
- Library of Things is popular and seen as an innovative value-add, even among focus group attendees who have not used the L.O.T. personally.
- E-collections available through Libby and OverDrive and funded by the State are both well used and well appreciated. However, this option has not lessened the demand for more print materials (partly because wait times for e-materials can be quite long).
- Attendees rave about the abilities and attitude of staff, and in particular about the programming they are able to pull off within finite means.
- Social service issues may require frontline library staff to be trained on how to handle difficult situations and/or to know exactly where to direct people who have an expressed need not serviced by the library (ex., a partnership with a food pantry).
- Library should be the "clearinghouse" for all social service information about what is available in St. Croix County.
- Consider cross-training of staff.
- In general the kids area is too small and geared mostly towards children aged kindergarten and under.
- Most parents are not particularly worried about the children's zone's proximity to the stairs, though it is a concern expressed by a few.

- HAPL makes a concerted effort to serve the area’s sizable homeschool population, which is appreciated.
- The sensory room and its resources are likewise appreciated, but this is only available one week a month. Moving it in and out is a lot of work for staff and volunteers.
- The kids’ area is loud in inclement weather, presumably due to the roofing materials used.
- Some parents want the children’s area to have a few computer terminals available. Others are supportive of a space that is “unplugged” in exactly the way it is now.
- Dominant narratives are largely around funding and governance, not resources and services. There is broad hope that with the dissolution of the joint district, people can begin to focus on and want to build upon the strengths of HAPL.
- Users are not yet accustomed to the new ownership reality and what it means – for Hudson, for the surrounding communities, and for them personally.
- There is provisional interest in the idea of book returns at alternate locations and “book lockers” accessible after hours.
- Attendees believe that staff are underpaid, especially compared to surrounding libraries. It was said twice that they are “among the lowest paid in the state” (which is historically true, though the dissolution of the joint powers arrangement allowed HAPL to pursue a significant market-rate adjustment).
- Hudson Library Foundation is seen and appreciated for helping out the library in times of special need (as well as on an ongoing basis).
- HAPL needs to expand to keep pace with community growth and address all the issues discussed.
- When asked, nearly all focus group attendees prioritize adequate size over the current location (assuming that the current spot cannot be expanded to accommodate sufficient *growth-in-place*). The area around the intersection of Carmichael & Vine emerged as a particular locus of interest.

March 4, 2-4 p.m.

1. Hutton, Terilynn
2. Johnston, Ben
3. Klingfus, Pamela
4. Knott, Kris
5. Lampman, Slater
6. Lewandowski, Dawn
7. Lewandowski, Mike
8. Schneider, Alicia
9. Schoess, Tori
10. Searles, Ann
11. Truso, Sarah

March 4, 6-8 p.m.

1. Chintapenta, Karuna
2. Deziel, Paul
3. Fett, Heidi
4. Filiatreaux, Addison
5. Gilbert, Susie
6. Mueller, Rachel
7. Sjoberg, Roy
8. Skinner, Joel
9. Swarbrick, Michele

March 5, 9-11 a.m.

1. Anderson, Tina
2. Douglas, Theresa
3. Grams, Kendra
4. Lacke, Heather
5. McCarthy, Kristine
6. Montgomery, Ellen
7. Powers, Molly
8. Sauter, Alison
9. Thurston, Amy

March 7, 2-4 p.m.

1. Behnke, Joe
2. Bloomsma, Tori
3. Dahl, Katie
4. Dittloff, Sammi
5. Leaf, Cathy
6. Miller, Renee
7. Rouleau, Joe