

MEMORANDUM

To: George Crimmins
Carl Schaefer

From: Elizabeth Vandor

Date: December 6, 1996

Re: Hoboken Public Library

The following information is abstracted from two studies I produced between 1992 and 1994: the Community Facilities Plan Element of the city's master plan and the Hoboken Public Library Space Utilization Study. Josephine Valenti was the director of the Industrial School at the time. She provided information on the operation and funding of the classes. Information about the history of the shared use of the entire building was gleaned from reading original materials which I was given access to in the head librarian's office.

The library occupies a handsome building constructed in 1896 at the northwest corner of Fifth Street and Park Avenue opposite Church Square Park. The construction of the library resulted from a bequest by the Stevens family, matched by the city and supplemented by bonds. The Stevens specified that the building also make adequate accommodation for a manual training school.

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NOTE: There is probably a deed restriction referring to the Stevens bequest that the school be used for the training of immigrants and/or adults over the age of 18.

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The northern end of the structure was identified for that purpose but, unfortunately, the actual assignment of space was never defined in the deed. The result is that the Industrial School, clearly meant to be the secondary user, controls over 60% of the space. The use of space was established in 1915 and has remained so to this day.

The library is organized much the same way as described in the community facilities plan of 1955. The adult non-fiction department, the circulation desk and the offices of the head librarian and staff occupy about 4,200 square feet of the first floor. The former "German Room" facing the park has become the "Lucille Cunningham Board Room". Although it was once used as the Board Room, the Board now meets in the Head Librarian's office. A mezzanine was added to the non-fiction department giving 1,650 additional square feet of space.

About 3,400 square feet of the second floor is used for the reference department. This includes a large, well-lighted periodical reading room facing Church Square Park. Historic books, which are gradually being transferred to microfiche are kept locked in cages on this floor. The historic books and the "law room" occupy an additional 900 square foot area on the north side of the building which is "shared" with the Industrial School. As a result, the shared space is closed to library use after 6 P.M. In return for heat provided to it by the library, the Industrial School allows the use of the law room as well as the 3rd floor juvenile department during the day. The school then utilizes the space in the evening for its adult students.

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NOTE: The Industrial School operated classes using funds from the City and state matching funds. There were about 354 students in 1993 taking courses including knitting, typing, computers, ceramics, Italian and Spanish.
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In addition, the second floor suffers from lack of security. The librarian sits in one side of a "U" shaped arrangement of rooms which surround and open onto a very large stair landing. Because all the doors on the floor have been removed, she cannot regulate or observe the movements of visitors in and out of the rooms. Of

most concern are the junior high school and high school students who come with their bookbags and backpacks to use the collection of encyclopedias. The lack of doors between rooms and the absence of carpeting also contributes to an excessive amount of noise.

The juvenile department occupies about 2,000 square feet on the third floor as it has since 1915. This location is desirable neither from a safety nor from an organizational point of view. The department has to close at 6 P.M. to allow use by the Industrial School.

The recent installation of air conditioning in the juvenile department has resulted in a mass of exposed, industrial sized conduits which criss-cross and dangle from the high ceilings. The lack of carpeting and space dividers keeps the noise level unnecessarily high. The inclusion of the young adult collection on this floor effectively keeps the adolescents from reading.

The library currently receives funds from the New Jersey State Library Bureau of Development. A population-based formula results in a specified number of professional librarians, full-time (or FTE) staff, a minimum number of circulation volumes (one per capita), a minimum annual rate for newly purchased books (10% of previous number), a minimum number of periodical subscriptions as well as the number of hours of operation per week.

Ironically, a professional "weeder" must be hired to get rid of 200-300 old books each year to free up some space in the wake of the 4,200 new volumes purchased annually. At the present rate of state funding (around \$45,000 annually), the city is reimbursed for little more than the cost of one professional. It is required to have four professionals plus 11 staff members.

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NOTE: The Trustees were considering giving up the state funding in order to cut staff and cost at the time I did my study.
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Table 7 in the library study compares Hoboken's library to the American Library Association standards for small public libraries. It is interesting to note that Hoboken exceeds the standards for numbers of books (104,000 volumes v. 70,000), shelving (9,945 linear feet v. 8,800) and reader space (4,050 square feet v. 3,150). It is lacking in staff space (900 square feet v. 1500) and miscellaneous additional space (3,160 square feet v. 5,250). This is clearly the result of having a relatively small total floor area which has given priority to books and readers.

The library not only has no elevator, but it has a very steep set of exterior stairs. The height of the stairs and the narrow width of the side alley preclude the possibility of making the building physically accessible. Phone requests are taken by staff for people who cannot come to the building. Although this meets the "programmatic accessibility" standard somewhat, a better solution is proposed below.

PLAN

In the comparison of the Hoboken Library to the American Library Association standards, the main areas of need were shown to be staff space and "other" spaces such as circulation, maintenance and toilet areas. A recently completed space utilization study made recommendations related to internal organizational changes that could resolve most of those problems.

The ADA compliance survey, however, revealed that the building is inaccessible to the handicapped and is virtually impossible to make accessible because of site constraints. The law anticipated such situations and states that as long as "programs" are made accessible, the institution can achieve compliance.