

# BUILDING HOPE:

By CELESTE BRUNO



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*The new Westhampton Public Library was designed to blend into the town's historic center.*

**E**ven in this online age, more people visit their public library each year in Massachusetts than attend Patriots, Celtics, Bruins and Red Sox games combined. In 2011, library usage increased for the eleventh year in a row. Many public libraries, some built more than a century ago, are struggling to meet the growing demand for services.

For the past twenty-five years, the Massachusetts Public Library Construction Program has partnered with local and state officials from more than 200 communities to build new libraries or expand and renovate existing historic ones. "Public libraries are a valuable resource for cities, towns and residents across the Commonwealth," says Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray. "The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners' program assists municipalities with the construction of top-notch, environmentally conscious facilities that will serve residents for many years to come." Over the past year, the MBLC awarded more than \$68 million in provisional library construction grants, funded by the 2008 Governmental Needs Bond Act, to provide crucial funding to local libraries for repairs and updates.

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COURTESY PHOTO

*People line up to view the new Pearle Crawford Memorial Library in Dudley.*

# PUBLIC LIBRARY CONSTRUCTION IN MASSACHUSETTS

## How the Program Works

Most public library construction projects are in development for three to five years before a community applies for a construction grant. Often the library works with residents and local officials to understand the library service needs projected out for the next twenty years, as well as whether an addition to the current building is feasible or whether a new facility on a different site is required. This work culminates in the writing of a library building program: a narrative and statistical presentation of the library services, spaces and collections, and their relationships with each other. This building program is then given to the project architect as the starting point for interior layout and exterior design. The architect will work with a local library building committee, the library director and the library trustees throughout the design process.

Many communities apply for a planning and design grant through the Massachusetts Public Library Construction Program to help with the costs of this initial design work.

Capped at \$40,000, these design grants help communities assess the need for a project, explore the feasibility of sites, and cover the initial design costs, while preparing the community and library to apply for a full construction grant. Board of Library Commissioners staff are available to guide libraries through the process from start to finish.

With the design done and a site identified and vetted, it is usually the library director's job to write the application to the Board of Library Commissioners for a full construction grant. The application becomes the guiding description of every aspect of the proposed project. It documents the need, discusses development of the building program, details how that program is carried out in the schematic design, explains the choice of site, and generally makes the case for the project. Not only is this document the application to the Library Construction Program, it is also used to present the case for private fundraising. Most projects are state, local and private partnerships.



*The newly completed Mattapan Branch Library in Boston includes a teen room.*

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Applications are invited in grant rounds that come every five years or so, depending on the availability of state capital bond funds. Applications are reviewed by five-member review teams that include librarians, trustees and building committee members who have built a library project, from Massachusetts as well as out-of-state, and an architect who is not otherwise involved in the grant round. The reviewers read, analyze, score and rank the projects assigned to them. From these rankings, a final list is developed and presented to the Board of Library Commissioners for approval. Communities at the top of the list receive provisional grant awards as funds are available, and the remaining communities are placed on a rank-ordered waiting list pending availability of funds.

Communities that built new libraries or renovated existing ones saw the number of library visits increase by 30 percent once the project was completed.

Grant awards are averaging about 50 percent of eligible project costs, with the difference to be matched by the community using municipal and privately raised funds. The Board of Library Commissioners usually gives communities six months to confirm this local match and sign a grant contract. Once the contract is signed and the project begins, grants are disbursed on a five-year schedule (20 percent per year), so long as the project stays on schedule. The community has 20 percent of the award in hand before the general contractor begins construction.

## Projects Under Way

Granby and Athol, which celebrated groundbreakings on October 17, are just two of the many communities with projects under way. In Granby, a new library will be built on a parcel donated by a local resident. In Athol, the historic 1918 Carnegie Library is being renovated and expanded. "This will revitalize this whole area," says Athol Selectman Tony Brighenti.

Also moving forward with library projects are Boston (East Boston), Boxford, Everett, Foxborough, Holyoke, Millis, South Hadley, West Springfield and Westwood. Bolton, Boston (Mattapan branch), Buckland, Cambridge, Dudley, Mashpee, Middleton, Milton, Northborough, Walpole and Westhampton have recently completed projects.

On October 4, the Board of Library Commissioners awarded provisional grants to eight more communities: Acushnet (\$3,189,53), Belmont (\$7,597,928), Edgartown (\$5,002,139), Framingham (\$4,186,560), Reading (\$5,105,114), Salisbury (\$3,856,187), Scituate (\$4,985,480), and Shrewsbury (\$7,959,989).

The following is the current list of Board of Library Commissioners-approved projects waiting to receive funding (listed in rank order):

**Webster:** \$5,366,489

**Sandwich:** \$6,683,197

**Woburn:** \$9,906,275

**Eastham:** \$4,331,923

**Hopkinton:** \$4,533,580

**Boston (Boston Public Library, East Boston branch):** \$7,255,988

**Somerville:** \$18,100,101

**Stoughton:** \$6,702,689

**Hatfield:** \$3,211,427

**Sherborn:** \$3,633,603

**Leicester:** \$4,233,264

The Board of Library Commissioners is currently working with local and state officials to secure a new state bond authorization to fund library construction in these wait-listed communities and to support a new construction grant round.

## Economic Impact

Across the nation, libraries serve as anchors in their downtowns. A recent study of libraries that built new buildings or renovated existing ones between 1994 and 2004 in Massachusetts found that the number of library visits for services and materials increased by 30 percent once the project was completed. This means 30 percent more people walked, drove or took public transportation to downtown business areas to get to their public library, and this additional traffic helps local businesses.

Holyoke City Councillor Aaron Vega calls his city's library an "economic driver." Holyoke is in the process of expanding and renovating its library, which was built in 1902. "I knew that having a twenty-first-century library was critical to getting education in our community back on track and critical to our downtown area," Vega says. "Businesses see that they have a partner in a city that is investing in its downtown." The library is the latest in a series of capital projects in Holyoke, including a Green High-Performance Computer Center, a senior center, a community field, and the restoration of Veterans Park.

The city's library construction grant, combined with a \$2.5 million capital campaign, enabled Holyoke to become the first community to use the New Markets Tax Credit, which kept the bond down to \$5.5 million for a \$14.5 million project. "Even now we see the economic impact," Vega says. "We hired local contractors and subcontractors to keep our dollars local, and these are people who will come to the library and bring their families."

## Program Promotes 'Green' Libraries

Libraries that win construction grants can receive additional funding through the Green Library Incentive if they attain Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification. The Green Library Incentive, created by the Board of Library Commissioners in 2008, helps to offset the cost of incorporating environmentally friendly and energy-efficient materials in library building projects. LEED-certified libraries receive Green Library Incentives of 2 percent to 3.5 percent of their total construction grant award in additional funding from the Board of Library Commissioners.

"Encouraging green libraries as part of the Library Construction Program makes sense," says Commissioner Greg Shesko, the board's liaison to the construction program. "Communities will reap savings in smarter buildings designed for the twenty-first century."

To date, nearly half a million dollars has been awarded to four LEED-certified libraries, and on October 4, the Board of Library Commissioners approved just under \$1.5 million in Green Library Incentives for the eight communities that were awarded construction grants.

The library is also an educational investment that benefits all residents and helps them improve their own economic situation. "The library provides access to technology that many underprivileged residents don't have and that can open doors for them," Vega says. City officials are working together to develop a "corridor of knowledge" that ties the new library into the local school system, area colleges and the computer center.

The city of Somerville is also banking on a major library project to boost its local economy. Its proposed \$43 million Somerville Public Library, a 70,000-square-foot building to be located in the heart of the city's "new" Union Square, is expected to be a major contributor in the effort to revitalize the square. An estimated 5,200 people are expected to visit the area each week just to go to the library, and this will mean many more potential customers for local businesses. The new library will feature community spaces like meeting, conference and group study rooms that will be available to individuals, local groups and organizations during the day and after hours.

The proposed Somerville Public Library will also offer business opportunities. The new building will offer separate retail and café space for local entrepreneurs to fit out and rent. Rentals will provide a revenue stream for the library and city and provide added value to the library experience for visitors. This type of win-win also can be found in other libraries, such as the Crane Library in Quincy and the Brookline and Boston public libraries.

## Local Support Is Key

None of these projects would be possible without local support. Library construction grant recipients work with their community to gain the local match funding necessary to move forward with a provisional grant. For many communities, this process becomes a way to inform people about the project and invite them to be part of it. For the small island community of West Tisbury, the process began almost two years before town meeting approved a debt exclusion for the library.

West Tisbury received a library construction grant on July 14, 2011. As is true in most communities, there were concerns about taking on such an endeavor in the current economic climate as well as concerns about other capital projects that needed attention. "The construction grant put the wind in our sails," says Library Trustee Dan Waters. "We were able to say to potential donors, 'for every dollar that you give, we will match it with three dollars [the grant plus the town's contribution].'" By the time the community voted, three quarters of the necessary funding had been raised through the state grant and private donations. Library Director Beth Kramer "invited people in and made them part of an amazing team," Waters says.

Kramer and the West Tisbury Trustees submitted a grant application in the 2010-2011 grant round. "This was our moment" says Kramer. "The Board of Library Commissioners had just increased the average grant award significantly. If we had waited for a better economy down the road, there was a very real possibility that the board would not be awarding grants."

Waters agrees. "There are always advantages and disadvantages," he says. "When the economy is good, building costs are higher. Now costs are much lower, and we had known since 2007 when we did a space-needs analysis that the library needed to double in size."

One of the ways they helped to build public support for the library was through monthly public forums. "We explained and answered questions about the need for a bigger library," Waters says. "If we didn't have the answer to a question, we got it and called the resident. Some of the most skeptical folks became our biggest champions." Local artists held fundraisers, the ladies' knitting group made a quilt that was auctioned off, and local resident authors, like David McCullough, held special fundraising events. "Everyone in town has a sense of ownership of this library," Waters says. The groundbreaking was held on December 12.



COURTESY PHOTO

*South Hadley has unveiled its plans for a new public library.*

## Looking Forward

The question is often asked: How long will public libraries exist as a physical space in an increasingly virtual world of ebooks, mobile computing, digital research and other emerging technologies? Going forward, libraries will increasingly integrate traditional and updated services with new and innovative ones, new collection formats, and more opportunities for community engagement and creativity. The result will be a blending together of the virtual and the physical worlds. Libraries will adapt their programs, modes of information delivery, and options for how the building is used to meet the needs of individuals and groups for collaborative work, meetings and creative outlet spaces. The library as a building will always reflect community pride and values. Its physical presence signals its standing as an educational, cultural and economic anchor—an attraction for all people.

Public library design today is about flexibility. Priority is placed on the following:

- A community gathering space allowing for after-hours use
- Flexible spaces that can be reconfigured and repurposed
- An infrastructure that can expand and adapt
- An efficient and cost-effective floor plan
- Energy efficiency and environmentally friendly operation

Every library that has benefited from the Public Library Construction Program has experienced a major increase in usage. For example, the Crawford Memorial Library in Dudley, a town of just over 11,000 people, opened in July 2010, replacing a building that was originally built in 1901. “We have been

very successful, to say the least,” says Library Director Nancy Barta-Norton. “In the first year in the new building, our attendance went from 33,796 to 74,764—an increase of 121 percent—and our circulation went from 46,880 to 81,380—an increase of 73.4 percent.” In Mashpee, usage was up 55 percent in the first five months after the opening of the new library, and 1,700 residents got new library cards.

The 2009 study *Impact of Library Construction on the Use of Libraries in Massachusetts*, conducted by Lushington Associates, compared library use at construction program libraries with use at libraries that were not replaced, renovated or expanded. While the hours of operation increased only slightly in construction program libraries (3 percent), there were significant usage increases. Adult attendance at library programs increased by 165 percent, and attendance by children increased by 66 percent. Borrowing/circulation increased 27 percent among construction program libraries, versus 4 percent for non-construction libraries. In-person visits increased by 30 percent for construction libraries, compared to 9 percent for others. And program attendance nearly doubled at construction libraries, compared to a 22 percent increase for other libraries. Even reference questions grew five times more at construction libraries compared to others. Clearly, libraries are still vibrant, active community centers, and the Library Construction Program gives them, and their cities and towns, a substantial boost.

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*For more information about the Massachusetts Public Library Construction Program, visit [mblc.state.ma.us/grants/construction](http://mblc.state.ma.us/grants/construction) or contact Library Building Consultant Rosemary Waltos at (617) 725-1860, ext. 246, or [rosemary.waltos@state.ma.us](mailto:rosemary.waltos@state.ma.us)*

# Libraries Double as Disaster Recovery Centers

In 2008, the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners joined the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency in the development of a pilot project that assigns Massachusetts public libraries the central role of acting as emergency management disaster recovery centers. Improvements, additions and new library construction made possible in part through the Public Library Construction Program make libraries ideal locations for disaster recovery centers.

Disaster recovery centers are spaces where FEMA, MEMA, the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the Small Business Administration and other recovery agencies meet with

residents to provide assistance with insurance, health care, unemployment and crisis counseling following a disaster declaration. “Libraries as DRCs is a natural fit,” says Fred Vanderschmidt, deputy director for FEMA’s Disaster Systems Division in Region 1. “Librarians are trained to help people access information. Everyone knows where libraries are. They have Internet, they’re safe and secure, and they are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.”

During record flooding in the spring of 2010, public libraries in Billerica, Lakeville, Lancaster, Middleton and Quincy, all of which have received library construction grants, served as disaster recovery centers. “Having a DRC at the

library, available to the greater Lakeville community, was a major benefit to the residents who experienced flooding in their homes,” says Lakeville Library Director Olivia Mello. “Within a few days, the center was incorporated as just another of the Lakeville Library services.” The center stayed open for more than three months.

When devastating tornados swept through western Massachusetts in June 2011, federal and state officials opened the Jacob Edwards Library in Southbridge—which received construction grant funding in 1997—as a disaster recovery center. In August 2011, the Berkshire Athenaeum in Pittsfield was opened as a disaster recovery center after Hurricane Irene.

Many residents who were without power for days or weeks after the early snowstorm in October 2011 turned to their public libraries. Libraries responded by setting up charging stations for cell phones and additional Internet computer stations. Natick’s Morse Institute Library stayed open as a “comfort station” to provide Natick residents with a warm place to sleep. Cots and blankets were provided, along with some donuts. Auxiliary police and volunteers staffed the library for the overnight hours. “Even folks who did not have to use the library as a warm place to sleep were thanking us for offering this service,” says Library Director Linda Stetson.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL PRATT MEMORIAL LIBRARY, COHASSET

*The Lakeville Public Library stayed open for more than three months to serve as a Disaster Recovery Center for residents during record flooding in the spring of 2010.*