

# MRV ARCHITECTS

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Project: Ketchikan Library  
Subject: Centennial Building Library Option

To: Heidi Ekstrand, Martha Schoenthal

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The Feasibility Committee has requested that MRV review the possibility of converting the Centennial Building to exclusive use as the new library. The following strategic issues are raised by that conversion:

1. The ability to renovate the full Centennial Building for library use is contingent on relocation of the Ketchikan Museum. The Museum shift, in turn, is contingent on other space and building changes elsewhere to provide a new home. The new location for the museum is uncertain, and opinions vary widely. The various permutations are not addressed here, but any realistic time frame to identify a site for the museum, and either build or renovate such a space to receive the museum, is likely to require a minimum of three years, and likely more.

If the museum shift is also linked to completing the construction of another unrelated building, such as the fire station, the process is likely to add another two to three years. Given that such shifts are still hypothetical in any case, a solution that adopts this shift/relocation strategy will require significant community debate on options before any course is initiated.

Four to five years are conservatively estimated for this process to relocate the museum, and it could easily be several more years. Legislative funding for a 50% library funding match is likely available this coming fiscal year, with a decreasing likelihood of availability in the years following.

2. Significant design funds have been expended on renovation designs for Centennial Building to do exactly the opposite of point one -- that is, the plan is to remove the library from the Centennial Building, and expand the building to provide an improved Ketchikan Museum. While that construction project is not yet funded, such a design direction and intent still appears to be in place. Such implementation, of course, has been stalled indefinitely because the library relocation has not yet been accomplished.

3. At a strategic planning level, it is the opinion of MRV that the Centennial Building location functions far better for a community museum than it does for a library. The Ketchikan Museum success is absolutely linked to visitation from the summer cruise ship traveler. The museum benefits greatly by the central location near the cruise ship docks -- it could be argued that the museum will fail without such close proximity.

Library use does not benefit from the Centennial Building location. In fact, library use by the community is curtailed during the summer high-traffic period because of congested streets, lack of parking, and competing use of library facilities by traffic from the cruise ships.

4. If the Centennial Building were fully converted to a library, leaving aside the planning issues above, several technical challenges with the building and site must also be addressed. First, the building is too small. The total Centennial Building area is 14,320 sq.ft. This is contrasted with a minimum size for the library two-story solution of 17,250 sq.ft., a 3,000 sq.ft. deficit, assuming that the existing spaces could be re-designed with 100% efficiency. So either new property is acquired from adjoining owners, which will prove quite difficult, or a partial third floor will need to be added to the building. A third floor will raise a number of technical issues, including seismic and structural concerns. More important, it will exacerbate supervisory and management issues created by operating a small library with public on three levels.

5. Parking changes required for the conversion of Centennial Building to a Library are also significant. At present, the library has one designated parking space in the lower parking area adjoining the building. The museum has no designated spaces. Neither library or museum has access to loading. At present, the 91 spaces in the front parking lot are reserved for general public use on a first-come basis. Per City code, the library will require 22 parking spaces, and also needs an area designated for bus drop-off and queuing. For the expanded library function to succeed, portions of the existing lot would need to be dedicated exclusively to the 22 library spaces. Without such parking, the library use will continue to be compromised by downtown congestion.

6. Technical issues associated with converting the Centennial Building to full library use are daunting. The building is 45 years old, and will require comprehensive upgrades to all building systems. More critical, and less-understood, library stack floor loads are required by code to meet 300 lb/sq.ft. loading. It is unlikely that the museum floor structure was designed for this high load capability. This will likely require that either the location of library stacks is awkwardly limited to the existing library portions only, or that the floor structure and seismic bracing in the museum is modified to take the additional stack loading at enormous additional cost. For this reason, buildings are seldom adapted to library use.

7. Timing and management issues associated with converting the Centennial Building to library use are also sobering. Since there is no alternate library location, the current library portion would need to operate during renovation of the museum portions, dealing with noise, dust, and increased site access limitations. After half of the building was completed, the library would need a closure period to relocate to the completed half, and the process would be repeated for the old library portions. The construction process would require about one year, minimum, for each half, and three partial shift/moves for the library operations.

Observations:

The challenges identified for converting the Centennial Building to the expanded library are extreme. The building itself, and its location along the creek, are much loved by a large section of the community. However, the timing, cost, and logistical problems associated with trying to make the Centennial Building succeed for the expanded library are inordinately difficult. In our opinion, these concerns make conversion an inappropriate decision.

Sincerely,

  
Paul Voelckers  
MRV Architects