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To: The Urbana Free Library

Re: Building programs

I have proposed to write a building program for the expanded Urbana Free Library at no cost.

A building program is a detailed statement of the space needs for a proposed new or remodeled building.

For each space in the planned library, the program includes

> The physical characteristics of the space,

> A list of the contents of the space,

> An estimate of the total size of the space in square feet, based on the contents of the space,

> And the physical relationship of the space to other spaces in the library.

Building programs focus on functionality, not on appearance. They serve as libraries' instructions to their architects. Programs describe what spaces libraries need, not on how buildings will appear, which is a matter of architectural design.

Some people regard a building program as the statement of a problem and the architects' designs as the solution.

Writing program before design work begins is important, to prevent projects starting out with appearance rather than with how things function.

Although someone has to write the text, input for building programs needs to come from a wide variety of people, including in particular library boards and library staff, but also library foundations and friends groups.

Some libraries seek general citizen input in the form of focus groups. For example, the library may interview such widely varied groups as parents of young children, genealogists, teenagers, people who rush in and out, people who want to spend half the day, etc.

In my experience, the easiest programs for everyone to work with are in outline form, with items listed separately and with space summaries at the end of each section to show the source of planning numbers.

Programs can be lengthy. Over the years I've written between 150 and 200 building programs, and they tend to range from about 50 pages for small libraries to as much as 250 pages for large, complex buildings. (Luckily, describing the shelving for 3,000 adult fiction books and for 100,000 adult fiction books takes about the same amount of space.)

I've also written two-phase programs, designed to make sure that whatever is done during Phase I doesn't make the spaces necessary for Phase II impossible to construct.

The programs I've written typically include information on the basic functional design of library buildings—natural and artificial lighting, electrical wiring, HVAC, furnishings, etc. I also tend to list design ideas that have repeatedly proven to cause problems.

Programs are usually written and rewritten. In my experience, I've seen individual programs go through half-a-dozen or more versions.

Programs are useful as part of construction grant applications and to support other fundraising efforts.

If I write a program for The Urbana Free Library I would expect the process to take four to six months, allowing for meetings with all the groups involved, describing what I understand is wanted, and then revising the document until everyone is satisfied.

In almost all of the projects I've worked on I've helped libraries hire architects following state laws (Illinois has a QBS—qualifications based selection—process) and helped make sure that the proposed building design is in accordance with the program and doesn't introduce any functional problems.

A lot of what I watch for is described in **The Practical Handbook of Library Architecture: Creating Building Spaces that Work**, which John Moorman and I wrote for the American Library Association a couple of years ago. It's something over 1,000 pages long. (Of the many people who read through the text before publication, probably the most helpful was Celeste Choate.)