CPL150
COMMUNITY VISION PLAN
SUMMARY REPORT: 2014 - 2017

• Brooklyn
• East 131st
• Eastman
• Fleet
• Hough
• Mt Pleasant
• South
• South Brooklyn
• Sterling
• Union
• Walz
• West Park
• Woodland
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CUDEC Staff:
- Terry Schwarz - Director
- David Jurca - Associate Director
- Kristen Zeiber - Project Manager
- Jeffrey Kruth - Senior Urban Designer
- Matt Provolt, Sam Friesema, and Jonny Hanna - Post-Graduate Fellows
- Beth Conway - Marketing Manager
- Ellen Schneider and April James - Office Managers

CPL Staff:
- Timothy Diamond - Chief Knowledge Officer

Special thanks:
- Community Development Corporations, City Council members, and other Community Partners in the 13 branch communities surveyed
- Each branch manager and the staff of each CPL150 branch
- All community members and patrons who participated in the CPL Community Vision Planning Process
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY: Why Libraries?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGAGEMENT PROCESS</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPL BRANCH EXPERIENCE</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience Mapping</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMON THEMES</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounds</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESOURCES</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

From 2014 through 2017, staff from Kent State University’s Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative (CUDC) have been working with the Cleveland Public Library (CPL) to survey and engage 13 of their 27 branches in a process called the CPL150 Community Vision Plan.

2019 is the 150th anniversary of the Cleveland Public Library, and to prepare for this milestone, CPL wanted to find out how best to serve its many and diverse constituents. The Cleveland Public Library recognizes that every community is different, and will need custom-tailored strategies for meeting their needs. The CPL150 process was our combined strategy for determining these neighborhood-specific needs and solutions.

Each of the 13 branches received its own engagement process and design recommendations, published in three separate reports from 2015-2017. These broke down as follows:

**2014-2015**: Group 1 Branches *(Fleet, South, Sterling, Woodland)*
**2015-2016**: Group 2 Branches *(Brooklyn, East 131st, Mt Pleasant, South Brooklyn)*
**2016-2017**: Group 3 Branches *(Eastman, Hough, Union, Walz, West Park)*

Many of the ideas and concerns the design team heard at each of these branches were echoed across most or all of the branches surveyed. Rather than limiting these higher-level common themes to individual branches, we have taken the liberty of mining them for this summary document, in order to identify system-wide challenges and opportunities for CPL’s neighborhood branches into 2019 and beyond.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** The 13 branches in the CPL150 Community Vision Plan and their final community-preferred recommendations
In May of 2017, at a focus group with West Park Branch seniors, one woman voiced a common question our team heard throughout the course of our three years engaging 13 branches in the CPL system: “Are libraries still relevant?” In an age where physical books are less frequently used, what is the role for a neighborhood branch library in the 21st century?

In reality, as we found throughout our three-year process, Cleveland’s libraries are more important than ever. As our economy increasingly transitions to one based on information, libraries will continue to function as community centers and knowledge hubs. Far from simply being repositories for books, today’s libraries provide technology training, social services, safe space for youth, and community work spaces. They attract hugely diverse user groups, and could be made even more relevant to additional demographics -- truly becoming community hubs for their public.

According to a 2016 Pew Research Center report, Americans continue to express strong support for their local libraries. 77% of respondents indicated that their public library provides them with the support they need, and 66% reported that the closing of their public library would have a major impact on their community.1 It seems that even in a time of increasing mistrust of institutions, our public library system continues to be viewed positively by the American people. Accordingly, the patrons surveyed in the Pew report have a long “wish list” for the resources they’d like to see their libraries provide. Rather than an either/or approach (ex. books or computers?), patrons increasingly want their libraries to be “both/and” places: both digital training centers AND book archives, both quiet work spaces AND lively meeting rooms. The report’s findings echo our own in the 13 CPL branches--even with limited space and limited resources, our neighborhood branches are being asked to provide more opportunities for patrons.

Far from becoming obsolete, neighborhood library branches are more important than ever to Cleveland’s neighborhoods. But our library system needs to be maintained and upgraded, or it risks obsolescence – especially with those who have the means to get their information and services elsewhere.

Like many other institutions in cities like Cleveland, the Public Library system faces scarce resources and funding. Deferred maintenance creates ongoing challenges for facility upkeep, and limited hours and programming can alienate frustrated patrons wishing for more options locally.

**How is the library to best use its limited resources to meet heterogenous community needs?**

Librarians in particular wear multiple “hats” across the course of any given day: staff provide technology training, youth activities, research assistance, job-seeking advice, social service guidance, and many other roles, in addition to their primary duties. This condition is unlikely to change in the near future, creating ongoing challenges for each branch to continue to serve diverse user groups; however, the CPL150 process was designed to identify the main priorities for investment in each branch in order to better target specific improvements.

The 27-branch Cleveland Public Library system also faces competition with the libraries in surrounding inner-ring suburbs, whether managed independently (Lakewood, Shaker Heights) or as part of the Cuyahoga County system (Parma, Warrensville Heights). Many patrons—particularly those on the edges of the City of Cleveland boundary, like in Mt Pleasant, Old Brooklyn, and West Park—said they frequent suburban libraries instead of their neighborhood branch. These libraries tend to be newer, larger, and stay open later than the CPL neighborhood branches, making them more comfortable and convenient for many patrons. Though Cleveland library branches are fundamentally not comparable to suburban libraries (with 27 branches for one city, how could they be?), these lessons of convenience and accessibility could be transferable to the CPL system.
Cleveland’s libraries provide important “safe spaces” for youth:

Many of the youth surveyed in the CPL150 process described their local library as a “safe space” neither school nor home, but a *third space* which is both accessible and secure. Many staff members at local branches have been embedded in their communities for years, providing a sense of stability and security to city youth. Though the busy period after school can prove difficult for small branches to manage, it is essential to continue to provide this safe space for neighborhood youth.

Echoing this were adults who spoke positively about the role of their local library for the youth in the neighborhood (ex. Mt Pleasant Branch, East 131st Branch, Sterling Branch). **Providing safe access for kids, particularly after school when parents may still be working, remains a crucial component of our neighborhood branches.**

Cleveland’s libraries garnered near-universal praise for their staff:

Through the three-year engagement process, patrons almost universally counted their local staff as the number one strength of their branch. At every branch we surveyed, patrons voiced their deep appreciation for the people working at their neighborhood branches every day, including security guards, front desk staff, children’s librarians, and branch managers. **Even though CPL staff are doing more with fewer resources, they are performing with excellence and compassion, system-wide.**

Cleveland’s libraries can be integrated with other community uses:

Many of the CPL150 branches examined the possibility of combining the library with additional community uses. Examples include:

- Integrating a coffee shop into South Brooklyn Branch
- Relocating the Sterling Branch to within the nearby Tri-C campus
- Accommodating cultural or performance space within the branch itself, such as at Eastman Branch
- Developing a library in a larger development with office spaces, housing, or schools

Not all of these ideas were embraced by their patrons, but this larger trend towards libraries collaborating programmatically with complementary uses will likely grow.
ENGAGEMENT

The design team utilized a wide range of engagement tools to encourage diverse participation from community members based on their own preferences, including:

- Public meetings, at branches and elsewhere in the community
- Surveys (in English and Spanish) collected physically at the branches and spread digitally via social media
- Open houses at the branches for drop-in participation
- Focus groups with underrepresented groups (seniors, teens, etc)
- One-on-one interviews with staff, stakeholders, and patrons
- Advisory committees with staff, stakeholders, and patrons
- Attendance and outreach at other neighborhood events (street festivals, health fairs, etc) to advertise the process/upcoming meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisory Committee Members</th>
<th>95</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Meeting Attendees</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open House Attendees</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Participants</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Responses</td>
<td>751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Points of Engagement</td>
<td>1560+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE MISSING MIDDLE

Though we were able to connect with youth, adults, and seniors, the design team had a difficult time engaging residents aged mid-teens to mid-twenties; this seems to be the demographic that is currently most absent from the city’s libraries. When the design team tried to engage this demographic elsewhere in the neighborhood - as at the Archwood Street Festival (Brooklyn Branch), or a Lincoln-West High School focus group (South Branch) - many spoke of not needing the library as a community space once they were old enough to have independent mobility around the city, or no longer needing the library’s computer access once they acquired this technology in their own homes or mobile devices. Many younger residents who have internet access at home are accustomed to acquiring their media through their own means.

However, even for those with computing and media access in their own homes, neighborhood branches could provide an important role for younger entrepreneurs. Interviews at Walz Branch and Brooklyn Branch, for instance, signaled that daytime “co-working” spaces with wifi access might make local branches more relevant to the needs of young professionals in their communities. Providing flexible workspaces and small reservable meeting rooms could provide these residents with alternatives to local coffee shops. Existing meeting rooms could be retrofitted to provide this sort of flexible co-working spaces during the day, working around the youth lunch program and other needs. In conjunction with a larger public communications campaign, these co-working spaces could make local libraries relevant to a “missing middle” demographic.
OPEN COMMUNICATION WITH CDCs
The CPL150 Process involved close collaboration with related neighborhood groups like Community Development Corporations (CDCs). This communication was often welcomed by the CDCs and encouraged to continue after the process concluded; though CDCs and Library Branches generally support each other, a direct pipeline for communicating resources and events is often lacking. In many cases, staff from local CDCs and staff from CPL150 branches agreed to be more purposeful about keeping in touch and cross-promoting opportunities in the future, as in touching base monthly or generating shared event fliers. However, this collaboration is an ongoing communication need that will persist beyond the CPL150 plan.

COMMUNITY EVENT SPACE
Another takeaway from the CPL150 engagement process is the overall need for community event spaces in city neighborhoods. CPL150 public meetings often utilized church halls or schools. However, if advertised and promoted, the library branches themselves could be used for such events. Meeting rooms are available for use by community groups by request, but this fact is under-communicated and not immediately apparent in the wider community. Additionally, the main floor space can sometimes be rearranged (as in West Park Branch) for events like lectures, public meetings, or musical concerts. Moving forward, the library should broadcast the availability of their branches as community venues, and simplify the process of making arrangements.
CPL BRANCH EXPERIENCE

Throughout the Community Vision Plan engagement process, participants were encouraged to think broadly about their library experience. Both positive and negative, as well as current and future conditions, were collected using a multi-layered experience framework, first developed for the design team’s work with the Group 1 branches.

The CPL Branch Experience was framed as four layers, with corresponding physical scales:

- **Library Building** | small-scale
- **Library Grounds** | mid-scale
- **Neighborhood** | large-scale
- **Services** | scaleless

Engagement with the library begins before someone steps through the door. The outdoor space surrounding the library building can either enhance or detract from CPL’s core mission. If patrons are routinely unable to find parking or don’t feel safe walking to the library, they may visit less frequently. Similarly, residents are more likely to visit a well-designed building with an attractive and welcoming entrance.

The library building, library grounds, and neighborhood have clear physical scales: small, mid, and large, respectively. Library buildings range in scale from 3,000 square feet to over 14,000 square feet. The library grounds also vary considerably, from no available space to several landscaped lawn areas. Most branches have some outdoor space on or adjacent to their grounds, enhancing the 21st century library experience.

Library patrons experience services at different levels and scales. Patrons may use a digital kiosk or mobile device to find a book while inside the library. Classes and events are held at the library building or nearby neighborhood locations, but some services extend beyond neighborhood boundaries. For example, a patron may find a book from the Main Library through their home computer and request delivery to a neighborhood branch location. Or a patron might download an e-Book online while on vacation at the beach. All of these designed moments of contact, or touch points, with the building, grounds, neighborhood, and services create the CPL branch experience.

What is Experience Design?
Experience design (XD) is the practice of designing products, processes, services, events, and environments with a focus placed on the quality of the user experience and culturally relevant solutions.

The **library services** encompass the other three experience levels. Services include system-wide book transfers, classes, events, and online access to digital resources.

The **neighborhood** surrounds the library building and grounds, with direct impacts on the experience of library patrons through sense of safety, walkability, and community needs.

The **library grounds** includes the property owned by CPL surrounding a branch building. Parking, site signage, outdoor seating, and lighting are included in this experience layer.

The **library building** is the scale most patrons imagine when asked to think about the overall library experience. This scale involves the building’s interior layout and exterior architectural design.
EXPERIENCE MAPPING

In the course of the design team’s work, we experimented with tools from the field of Experience Design, including a tool called a Journey Map. In a Journey Map, impressions along a route - especially one new to the subject - are documented in order to learn lessons about messages that environment is sending, both positive and negative. A journey map is a research tool that integrates the four scales, including physical and digital environments, to provide insights.

In the case of the Walz Branch journey map shown opposite, the design team tracked Rick, a resident who had never been to the branch, as he navigated the Detroit-Shoreway neighborhood and discovered the library. This documentation is particularly useful to understand the points of friction along the route which may inhibit potential new users from seeing the value of their local library branch. The chain of user experiences is as strong as its weakest link; a frustrating encounter may end a user’s choice to continue.

Main insights from Rick’s experience discovering Walz Branch include the following:

- Students on the street after school lets out can be intimidating for some adults
- The intersection at Detroit and Lake could be more pedestrian friendly
- The lack of wayfinding may limit the number of people that know where the library is located, particularly coming from the east
- The interior isn’t very impressive; seems small upon first entering
- No consistent welcoming experience upon entering the library for the first time
- Lack of convenient digital interface to find books or other media can lead to frustration and reduced value placed on a physical library
- Preference for online access may continue to grow without clearer sense of value for a physical location
- Experience of meeting neighbors during the walk to and within the library could be a significant source of pride for people; perhaps a new location and interior layout could better support this valuable purpose for the branch library

By studying a user’s experience, the specific points in each library’s neighborhood, grounds, building, and services which create negative impressions can be directly addressed, ultimately improving overall user experience system-wide.
Rick was asked to find his way to the Walz Branch Library. He walked from his home to the library branch building to find a book he’s interested in reading. This is the first time Rick has visited his local Walz Branch Library.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIONS</th>
<th>THOUGHTS</th>
<th>EMOTIONS</th>
<th>EMOTIONAL BASELINE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rick is outside</td>
<td>Leaves home</td>
<td>Walks down his street’s sidewalk towards the library</td>
<td>Supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walks past Waverly School on Clinton Ave. / W. 74th Street and talks to crossing guard</td>
<td>Will all these students walking from school harass me? Is it safe to cross?</td>
<td>Confused</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walks down W. 74th Street to Detroit Ave.</td>
<td>Glad I have a chance to meet people in the neighborhood I might not otherwise see.</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starts to rain while he waits for light to change to cross Detroit Ave. at Lake Ave.</td>
<td>Is there a crosswalk closer to the library or should I cross now?</td>
<td>Concerned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrives at Walz Branch library entrance</td>
<td>Is this light ever going to change?! Should I keep waiting or just cross?</td>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searches history book stacks</td>
<td>I see a bike rack! I should have rode my bike. I thought the interior was bigger. Where do I begin?</td>
<td>Confused</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talks to librarian to check out book at the front desk</td>
<td>The tools available online are more useful for me to find the books I like. I'm lost searching by author's name.</td>
<td>Support Needed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick finds a book inside the library</td>
<td>Why do they have a copier? Do I have to come back to return the book? Could I have found this book online?</td>
<td>Support Needed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Journey Map**

Rick is a Detroit Shoreway resident
March 7, 2017
COMMON THEMES

Though each branch building is unique, with specific community needs, there were some emergent universal themes across all our branches. We’ve organized these by their “experience” category, as we have with our individual recommendations: building; grounds; neighborhood; and services.
Each branch is relatively small and many were opened into one contiguous floor area in the past, in order to bring different user groups together. However, this has more often brought these groups in conflict with each other, given differing needs. For example, adults trying to use computers in the afternoon often expressed their dismay with the increased volume from teens in the branch after school. Some younger professionals voiced their desire for smaller work spaces that could accommodate 2-3 people for phone calls, tutoring, or small meetings. Parents who brought their young children sometimes had them shushed by seniors wanting quiet.

Security concerns prevent separating children and teens (or any distinct user group) visually from the rest of the library floor, as in a separate room not visible from the front desk. However, it seems clear that almost every branch would benefit from some acoustic separation. Many branches (like Union Branch and Hough Branch) have space that could be cordonned off on the main floor with an interior glass curtain wall and glass door. Smaller meeting rooms with glass doors could be reserved by the hour for patrons wanting small meetings or quiet space.

Additionally, the existing meeting rooms could be better utilized; apart from the after-school lunch program and occasional meetings, they are often empty. Meeting rooms could be designated as co-working space during the day, and for after-school programming in the afternoon. In some cases (as in Fleet Branch and Brooklyn Branch) this might involve converting an existing solid wall into glass, in order to allow surveillance from the front desk.

Finally, many patrons were enthusiastic about the idea of providing flexible seating and work spaces, like small movable cubicles, lounge seating areas, and a “laptop bar” where people could use and charge up mobile devices. Though this may create spatial conflict with the existing shelving, a reorganization of space and furnishings seems necessary to provide an array of options for the many ways in which 21st-century patrons work, study, and interact.
Hand in hand with an array of spatial options is the importance of providing flexibility of the interior space. Though each branch feels crowded with stationary furnishings, in reality, the floor space could be opened up to create area for lectures, events, classes, and social spaces. This idea was especially popular in smaller branches like Brooklyn, and branches with a high demand for events and lectures, like South Brooklyn and West Park.

Stacks on the main floor space can be converted to low mobile shelving units, like the ones seen at lower left; movable cubicles, lounge seating, and a laptop bar (lower right) take up little permanent floor space but allow for a range of work styles.

In addition to investing in flexible furnishings and shelving, flexible technology can also help open up the possibilities for how each branch is used. Portable tech like iPads and laptops can reduce the need for dedicated PC work stations on the main floor, allowing patrons to take these devices (in addition to their own personal devices) anywhere comfortable in the branch. Patrons were highly supportive of these “tech toy boxes”, as already seen at Fleet Branch (below), and these options should be expanded everywhere else in the system.

When technology and furnishings are flexible, each branch’s floor area can be much more responsive to changing community needs.
Of all the branches we surveyed, many had community meeting rooms that were independently accessible from the building exterior; in Mt Pleasant and Union Branches, via a separate exterior door; in Hough Branch and Eastman Branch, via an interior gate that can serve to close off the main library floor from the meeting room and lobby spaces. **If these meeting rooms could be held open after normal library operating hours, it could greatly expand the library buildings’ usefulness to their larger community.** Community groups and other meeting needs (public meetings, book clubs, presentations, etc) could reserve the branch and pay a fee for the additional security needed, making the library building a more relevant and community-oriented resource.

Community meeting rooms should be available for after-hours access by neighborhood groups.

Community meeting rooms should be available for after-hours access by neighborhood groups.

Many branches have not had interior improvements since the 1970s or 1980s, and interior paint, carpet, furnishings, and lighting almost universally require updating and refreshing. At almost every branch we surveyed, patrons commented on the “dated” appearance of the branch interior--even in historic buildings like the East 131st Branch or the West Park Branch. **Updating paint colors, lighting, shelving, and furnishings to be modern, clean, and comfortable can indicate to Cleveland residents that their local library is a modern amenity for the 21st century, and that their public institutions are worthy of continued investment.**

An exception here is Woodland Branch, where patrons interviewed did not wish for significant change to the building; many referenced how many other buildings in their neighborhood have been changed or demolished, and the stability of the branch was comforting to them.

Bright colors, cheerful lighting, and comfortable furnishings can send a message of modern investment.

Bright colors, cheerful lighting, and comfortable furnishings can send a message of modern investment.
Not all branches in the system have usable outdoor space on their property. Some, like Mt. Pleasant and Eastman branches, are directly adjacent to sidewalks with no additional property area. And yet **in every branch we heard enthusiastic support for exterior spaces—to sit, to read, to host children’s story times, to use the wifi, to relax.**

Depending on the context, exterior spaces could take many different forms. Some, much like the Eastman Reading Garden at the Main Branch, could be tucked away, peaceful, and contemplative; some, like the front plaza area at Eastman Branch, could be lively and focused on the street. Many patrons expressed their wish for after-hours wifi access when the building is closed; this sort of outdoors “wifi garden” or plaza could become an important community gathering space, independent of whether the library itself is open.

Some branches did have security concerns about these sorts of outdoor spaces—Hough Branch, for example, felt that any new reading garden off the front entry plaza needed gates to be closed off after hours. In this way, each branch community should be able to co-create the specific outdoor spaces that make the most sense for their needs and their neighborhood. Just as the interior of the building can be rethought to better serve community needs, so should the outdoor spaces at each CPL branch.
Most branches lack significant visual presence and signage that could serve to invite new users.

At almost all of the branches we surveyed, patrons mentioned that their library branch was nondescript and easily overlooked. While patrons use the library in spite of this, it is possible many more community members could be attracted to the branches with improved signage, lighting, landscaping, and a general “face-lift” of the front entries. Focus groups, surveys, and Advisory Committee members reinforced this perception, with many non-users mentioning they do not know where their local branch is located.

In addition to improvements to the library building and services which could make the branches more relevant to these non-users, a concerted effort to improve street presence and signage could go a long way to attracting attention and creating visibility for a local library.

For branches with additional spatial needs, like Walz Branch, Sterling Branch, and South Branch, the required addition could potentially serve as this new “front doormat” to the branch building; if designed with modern materials and clear, well-lit signage, the building itself could act as that symbol of invitation.

In addition, each branch could also benefit from an overhaul in signage, lighting, and landscaping (where possible). Ideas for large modern signs and uniform banners were well-received by patrons at many branches surveyed.

“People who’ve lived in the neighborhood for years don’t know the branch is here; it’s so recessed and back from the street.”
Public art—murals, sculptures, and other media—is a well-supported opportunity to engage local artists.

Building on precedents from elsewhere in the CPL system, like at Rice Branch (BELOW LEFT), the design team explored the possibilities for including public art in more branches. Interestingly, at almost every branch, the idea of including public art on the building exterior or grounds was widely supported. Mt Pleasant Branch, South Brooklyn Branch, and Union Branch were particularly strong supporters of public art, especially if the art program could somehow engage local artists and/or youth.

Library public art programs could rotate every year, with artists responding to a call from the CPL in a neighborhood competition. Temporary murals could layer on existing blank walls, like at South Brooklyn (BELOW RIGHT), Union, and Eastman Branches, in order to draw attention to the branch and create new opportunities for local artists every year. Sculptures in outdoor reading gardens could highlight local fabricators. Local youth arts groups or after-school programs could help install the pieces, in order to generate wider community support and perhaps introduce neighborhood youth to potential career paths in the arts.

Finally, almost all the branches are in need of updated bike racks near their entries; collaborations between fabricators and local artists could create unique and useful amenities for cyclists.
After-hours access could be provided with a pick-up/drop-off “lobby” space accessed by card.

CPL branches open at 10:00am and close at either 6:00pm or 7:00pm, depending on the day; additionally, they are closed all day on Sundays. These hours can make it difficult for neighborhood residents to access their local branch outside of their own working hours; many residents voiced their desire for some sort of after-hours access, at least to pick up materials on hold.

The design team was inspired by a proposal by Andrew Berman Architects for branches in the New York Public Library system, in which an after-hours “lobby” could be accessed by patrons’ library cards, similar to an ATM lobby at a bank. This “engawa room,” as Berman labeled it, could allow for materials drop-off and even pick-up with an interactive wall display. (BOTTOM LEFT)

Some branches in the CPL system could benefit from this after-hours lobby concept; South Brooklyn and Walz Branch seem particularly well-suited, architecturally, to this treatment, and both communities also voiced their desire for increased operating hours and access. That said, even these spaces should be somewhat limited in accessible hours; Walz Branch patrons voiced strong concerns about allowing the lobby to be accessed before 7:00am and after 10:00pm, due to security concerns. Still, those hours would add at least 6 additional hours of access for neighborhood residents on either side of the existing operating hours, which could much more easily accommodate a wide range of schedules.
No matter how excellent an individual library branch is, the overall branch experience suffers if patrons have difficulty accessing the building. During the CPL150 process, the design team studied existing accessibility for each branch. We found patrons who experience erratic bus schedules, uncomfortable Transit Waiting Environments (TWEs), inadequately safe bike infrastructure, and long walks on their way to their local branch. Many of these are not in the purview of CPL; however, all impact the overall comfort of potential patrons.

Though some branches have small parking lots, many CPL patrons do not travel to their local branch by car. Instead, they take the bus, ride their bike or walk. Additionally, parking needs could decrease if these alternative transit modes are improved (patrons at Walz Branch and Eastman Branch noted this in particular). **Increasing multi-modal access to the branches should be a strong focus for the library system in conjunction with continuing to provide vehicular parking where possible.**
After-hours/after-dark safety is a continuing concern for many residents.

In many communities throughout the city of Cleveland, neighborhood safety—particularly after dark—is a concern and can become a barrier to expanding library use.

Patrons at branches like Sterling, Union, Walz, and Hough voiced safety concerns around neighborhood children walking home from the library branches at closing time - especially in the winter, when 6:00pm can be quite dark. Street lighting is often inadequate to promote a feeling of safety and comfort after dark. Many parents pick their children up at the branch by car rather than letting them walk home at closing time, with security guards sometimes staying late to make sure youth get home safely.

CPL branches can model a safe environment at their front entries, which can be redesigned to include bright lighting and friendly, clear signage (BELOW). However, CPL has little influence over neighborhood safety. That said, by continuing to work closely with neighborhood groups like Community Development Corporations (CDCs) and the City of Cleveland, safety needs can and should be addressed in order to encourage continued use and trust by neighborhood residents.
Frequently, the design team heard patrons voicing their wish for a service—tutoring, lectures, classes, etc.—that the library already provides. Our role throughout the project was often one of communicating existing resources. Most frequently that communication falls to individual staff members, who may or may not be aware of the full range of opportunities at their local branch or system-wide. For example, Walz Branch provides tutoring but the nearby Lorain Branch provides safety programming. If staff members at Lorain is not aware of Walz tutoring, they may not be able to communicate the opportunities elsewhere in the CPL system to a patron.

Each neighborhood branch should also better communicate the resources available in their local community. For example, Eastman Branch patrons voiced their wish for the branch to better identify social services like free lunches provided elsewhere in the neighborhood, and local bus lines and frequency. In this way, each branch becomes both an information hub for the CPL system, and for its local neighborhood.

Unfortunately, much of the existing information on display at the branches is presented in a visually overwhelming format—often, a table with piles of brochures and/or a bulletin board covered with flyers. Most patrons do not read this information, and staff are often too busy to talk to every patron.

Ultimately, CPL resources and local neighborhood resources should both be communicated in a clear, visually streamlined, and multi-format way to patrons. Again, lessons from Experience Design could be mined to overhaul the methods of communicating resources at each branch.
In conjunction with physical information display, library branches should expand their digital presence.

In addition to information display at the building, each branch should have a way to better communicate digitally. As of now, each branch has its own web page on the cpl.org website; however, these pages are basic, consisting only of operating hours and location. These pages could be an opportunity for each branch to post specific resources, classes, and larger neighborhood events that are tailored for their individual communities. Patrons could select their local branch and perhaps set that page as their “home” page within the site, so they can more easily see at a glance what opportunities CPL is providing in their neighborhood. Each branch could also operate their own social media pages to continue to reach patrons through a wide range of existing tools.

Limited hours makes after-work and weekend access difficult for many, who often use suburban libraries instead.

As mentioned in the Grounds section, many patrons desire their local branch to stay open later on weeknights and weekends, like neighboring suburban libraries. In addition to exploring the merits of a physical amenity like an after-hours lobby, branches should also look into expanding hours - particularly for Sunday afternoons, which was a popular request at many branches surveyed. If adding hours is not possible, “shifting” them may be - for instance, opening 11:00am - 8:00pm instead of 10:00am - 7:00pm on a given weeknight.

On the other hand, neighborhoods which have a perception of crime, especially after dark, regularly said they did not need later hours, which they felt would lead to safety concerns when leaving the branch. These branches - including Union, Walz, Hough, and East 131st - may be comfortable with the operating hours as they are currently, in conjunction with an after-hours book drop (and/or pick-up lobby).
Individual branches within a geographical “cluster” could specialize to provide a wider range of resources.

In some neighborhoods, the local branch is one of several in close geographic proximity; for example, Brooklyn Branch is close to South Brooklyn, Fulton, and South; Hough Branch patrons also frequent Addison, Langston Hughes, and Martin Luther King Jr. branches. Many patrons truly use the CPL system as a larger system, visiting branches where convenient to their schedules and geography. Given this network approach, some branches could think about specializing in a particular resource (e.g. youth, jobs training, technology, history, etc), while still offering some basic universal resources (book pick-up/drop-off, computer access). The specialization could extend to programming like lectures and classes. **In this way, some branches could take on a specific mission within the larger system, creating hotspots for targeted offerings that can draw patrons from larger geographies.**

Technology is needed everywhere, but some communities rely more on the Library for these needs.

All library branches serve important technology needs in their local communities - providing reliable computer and wifi access, classes in software and databases, and even cutting-edge options like 3D printers and virtual reality headsets (West Park Branch).

That said, some branches, such as Walz Branch and Mt. Pleasant Branch, placed a stronger emphasis on technology access and training than branches like South Brooklyn and West Park, where residents are more likely to have access to technology via other means. **Though all branches need continued investment in up-to-date technology options, resources should be focused on these higher-needs branches, even creating “tech hubs” like that proposed for Walz Branch.**
CONCLUSIONS

As libraries continue to innovate and reflect new media, technology, and information, their facilities and services will undoubtedly need to innovate and change to match. How they change, however, is up to each individual library community to co-create. The three-year CPL150 process was designed to provide methods for any engaged resident to provide that input on their local branch community.

Public library branches are important resources, whether 100-year-old brick Carnegie buildings or modern glass structures. Over the course of three years, the 13 CPL150 branches each worked through some difficult and weighty questions about resources, character, history, and technology. **What kind of library do we want in our local neighborhood? What are our main priorities and needs? What resources will we need in order to get there together?**

The answers to these questions were different in every community, with the final range of recommendations reflecting Cleveland’s diversity.

Moving forward with some of the CPL150 recommendations can signal to Cleveland residents that their library system is truly listening to and providing for its diverse public. In some cases, like at Walz Branch, this will involve continued engagement around questions of relocation. In others, like South Branch, a community mandate already exists to reinvest in our existing library buildings. On the Cleveland Public Library’s 150th anniversary, in 2019, we want to be able to confidently look forward to the community-supported improvements at our neighborhood branches which will bring these important public assets into the 21st century and beyond.
RESOURCES

cpl150.org  Project website for the CPL150 Community Vision Plan, including final reports from Group 1, Group 2, and Group 3

http://publications.arup.com/publications/f/future_libraries


Bell, Stephen: “Designing Better Libraries” website  
http://dbl.lishost.org/blog/

https://nycfuture.org/research/branches-of-opportunity
https://nycfuture.org/research/re-envisioning-new-yorks-branch-libraries

Knight Foundation: “Future of Libraries” website  
https://knightfoundation.org/topics/future-of-libraries

Knight Foundation: “Developing Clarity: Innovating in Library Systems,” March 2017  
https://knightfoundation.org/reports/developing-clarity-innovating-in-library-systems

More accessible parking, enhanced visuals
Flexible space
Signage
More use of outdoor space
Signage, outdoor, pedestrians must use sidewalk to cross to Pearl Rd.
Easier pedestrian crossing