

REPORT ON VISIT TO MATTAPAN LIBRARY

Patricia Raub February 8, 2012



I visited the Mattapan branch of Boston Public Library, and it is quite the spectacular library!

Opened early in 2009, the new building complex replaces a smaller facility that couldn't keep up with the growing demand for library materials and services in the neighborhood. While many people walked to the library from the surrounding streets, some drove there, and the parking lot was also considered too small to accommodate patrons' vehicles.

The new facility is 21,000 square feet, with 42,400 library materials (mainly books, with about 2,500 CDs and DVDs), 32 public computers (12 for adults, 12 for YA, and 8 for children), 22 public parking spaces, and a variety of meeting and study rooms, including a community room that holds 140 persons.

Partially funded through the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners with additional funds from the Massachusetts Public Library Construction Program, the building cost \$16.7 million to construct, according to the *Boston Globe*. ("New library hailed as Mattapan's future," March 1, 2009)

It was built to be "green," with a focus on "sustainable design strategies on energy performance, water conservation, sustainable site design and materials and indoor air quality." (BPL handout)

The complex consists of two parts: the brick-clad community room (with separate kitchen) to the left, and a higher, glass-enclosed section to the right that houses the public spaces as well as the staff area. One of the most note-worthy elements of the design is the courtyard in the center of the back of the main section, enabling the young

adult room and the children's room to either side to have a wall of floor to ceiling windows onto the outside. The two sections of the complex are linked by an enclosed corridor with entrances to the street in front and also to the parking lot behind the buildings.

The furnishings of the building are impressive. There are colorful carpets on the floor in all public areas, and many clusters of couches, stools, and tables throughout. The entire main reading room is bathed in light from the glass walls on the front and side.



The Young Adult room has seven clusters of small tables with two computers per table, two couch areas, some books along the back wall, and three study rooms, also along the back wall.

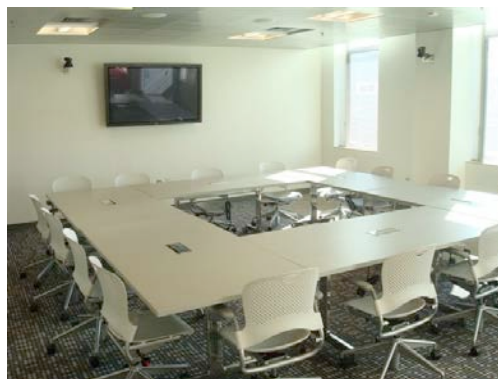
When I asked the head librarian what he wished had been designed differently, he mentioned the need for more study rooms. Despite the fact that the YA and children's rooms are enclosed and therefore separate from the adult reading room, adults apparently would like more peace and quiet. (The head librarian was not involved in the planning of the building and entered the picture only in time to supervise the moving of the books and other materials into the finished facility. Nevertheless, he seems quite pleased with the building.)

The Children's room is divided into two sections, with a set of low bookshelves providing the division. The left side has four clusters of stools, with a large couch beyond. The right side has another couch in the rear, with a cluster of four low tables in the front. In front of both these sections is the children's librarian's desk as well as the children's computers. This section is also set off from the other sections by low shelving.



To the right of the Children's Room is a separate craft room with four large tables and rolling stools. There is a separate restroom for the children's room.

Beyond the children's complex is a state-of-the-art smart conference room, with four long tables arranged in a hollow square, with sixteen chairs. There is a screen that mechanically drops down on the back wall, and there is an equipment closet in the front contains all the electronic equipment, with a touch screen.) This room is apparently used quite often for BPL staff meetings, although it is also used some for computer classes run by the branch library itself.



Like the other patron rooms, the main reading room (for adults) is divided into sections, with couches in the front corner, four rows of computers beyond, individual study tables along the front wall, and the reference desk in the midst of this area. Most of the back section of the room is filled with book and DVD shelving, with lower shelves near the circulation desk and higher shelves in far end of the room.



Facing toward the computer tables and the corner couches



Looking toward the glass-enclosed front wall. The reference desk is in the center, beyond the red chairs.

Physical space:

This building complex uses physical space well. The separation of the children's and young adult rooms from the main room seems to be working as well as possible to cut down on noise, adult patrons' complaints notwithstanding.

The use of low shelving within the various rooms to demarcate separate spaces enables the rooms to have a feeling of spaciousness. There are separate rooms for children's crafts, computer workshops, community programs, and individual study. While the courtyard serves only to provide additional light to the surrounding rooms in the winter, there were several tables with chairs in the courtyard and one imagines that it is fully used in warm weather.

The building implements state-of-the-art "green technology and award-winning architectural design, having won several awards. The use of natural light and the impact of the colorful furniture and rugs are especially noteworthy.

Service delivery and partnerships:

Ratio of traditional holdings to electronic ones

Traditional holdings (books):	42,000
Traditional holdings (magazines):	85
CDs and DVDs:	2,450
Computers:	32 (12 adult, 12 YA, 8 children's room)

Relationship of reference staff to patrons

There is a fixed desk for the three librarians—one in each of the three patron rooms. The desks are fully integrated into the rooms themselves near the center of each room, so that it is easy to approach the librarian for assistance.

Relationship with other community organizations

The head librarian was not knowledgeable about any partnerships BPL might have forged with community groups and told me I would need to check with the downtown administrator in charge of community relations (or whatever). I was given this person's card, but I have not called her. Nevertheless, it seems as though this library has a close relationship with the nearby school (which don't have school libraries of my own, if I understand the situation correctly). There were several school-aged children in both the children's room as the YA room.

New library hailed as Mattapan's future

\$16.7m building is most modern in city



Aiyanna Canty, 3, Nazir Canty, 2, and Aaniya Riddick, 2, all of Mattapan, enjoyed the new children's room at the Mattapan Branch Library yesterday. (Wendy Maeda/Globe Staff)

By [Brian R. Ballou](#)

Globe Staff / March 1, 2009

Ten-year-old Kayla Maloney broke out in a wide smile as she ran her small fingers along the bindings of books stacked in the young adults section of the new Mattapan library. The fifth-grader, a voracious reader who says she often falls asleep with a book on her pillow, stopped every few steps to pull out a novel and look at the cover.

"I'll read most of them," she told her grandmother, who was standing nearby. "This place is amazing," said Kayla, gazing up at the orange ceiling.

The library, a \$16.7 million modern building with an airy mixture of wood, glass, and attention-grabbing color, opened yesterday with fanfare, despite a budget crisis that has imperiled many city projects, programs, and services. Boston is facing an estimated \$145 million budget shortfall this year.

The newly elected Boston Public Library president, Amy Ryan, called the Mattapan Branch Library, the first new public library in Mattapan since 1932, "the best possible solution for the community."

"In times of economic downturns, people turn to libraries in droves," she said. "Why would you want to buy a book or rent a DVD when you don't have to because it can be checked out from the library?"

She said the library can serve as a job-hunting center for people who have lost work.

Ryan said the library was built with many cost-cutting and environmentally friendly features such as lots of glass that allows for sun to illuminate the interior during the day, and water- and energy-saving features throughout the 21,000-square-foot building. By contrast the former building on Hazelton Street, which closed earlier this year, was 7,200 square feet.

Library officials also touted the new branch as the most technologically advanced of Boston's 26 branches, with 30 computers available and several wide-screen televisions.

Boston Public Library is also planning to open a new Grove Hall Branch library April 4 that will be connected to Jeremiah E. Burke High School in Dorchester. This will be the first public library in the city to be attached to a school.

Ryan said requests for library cards citywide increased by about 33 percent over the past year, and she hopes the new branches will continue to attract more visitors.

"We wanted to create a place where the community can gather, where neighbors can see each other and spend time educating themselves and their children. That's really what this is all about," she said.

Mayor Thomas M. Menino cut the ribbon to the library yesterday morning, saying it will be a gem for the community, a place where the young, middle-aged, and elderly can come to educate themselves through books, computers, and other materials.

"This library is the future of our neighborhood," he said during the opening celebration.

Inside the library, children lounged on green sofas reading or sat and colored in the arts and crafts room, as praise was heaped on the architects and city officials for bringing the concept to reality,

Mattapan Branch librarian Maurice Gordon said, "this place will go a long way toward helping to build the community. It will start building self-esteem with the children and adults who use it."

Bianca Valentine brought her four children to the opening yesterday. Sitting at a table in the children's section, she said: "I go to the library a lot and usually I have to travel far, but this one is less than a mile from where I live. I plan on coming here a lot. This place is really incredible. They did a fantastic job and the kids love it."

About 500 people showed up for the opening. Aisles were jammed with adults leafing through books and parents pushing strollers. After the library was dedicated, the speeches given and the ribbon cut, it was business as usual, as long lines of parents and teens gathered at the checkout desk with small stacks of books in hand.

Cynthia Cornelius checked out several books and some audio/visual material for her 7-year-old grandson, Lorren Harvey-Cornelius.

"It's SpongeBob!" Lorren said.

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Mattapan Library wins architecture award

Boston Globe, May 3, 2011

By Cara Bayles, Town Correspondent

The American Institute of Architects has announced its 2011 building award recipients, and the [Mattapan branch of the Boston Public Library](#) was among five libraries recognized for their design, in anticipation of the organization's national convention in New Orleans on May 13.

The building was praised by the institute for its "sense of invitation," particularly its use of floor-to-ceiling windows, and spaces like Children's Room and Young Adults' Room which cater to specific patrons.

The \$16.7 million, 21,000 square-foot Blue Hill Avenue branch opened in February 2008, after a 14-year process spearheaded by City Councilor Charles Yancey. It was built to be energy-efficient, with natural light during the day, water and energy saving features and an improved indoor air quality system. It is also the most technologically advanced of the system's 26 branches.

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