

**COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT
SUMMARY
REPORT
NORTH VALLEY
PUBLIC LIBRARY**

Stevensville, MT

April 2024



TAB
Technical Assistance
to Brownfields



PREPARED FOR

North Valley Public Library Board
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INTRODUCTION

The town of Stevensville, MT (population 2,165) is located in western Montana, approximately 30 miles south of Missoula. The North Valley Public Library (NVPL, “the library,” or “the client”) has served the town of Stevensville since 1904. The library has been in its current space in downtown Stevensville since 1990, and has since outgrown the space. The existing building contains relatively small amounts of asbestos and is currently undergoing assessment by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ). As NVPL needs additional space, they are planning to construct a new building near their existing location.

Adaapta has been requested to provide technical assistance for community engagement and a feasibility analysis for the construction of a new building, along with funding recommendations and a roadmap that lays out key steps in the development process. Adaapta is a women-owned small business based in Denver, whose mission is to educate, empower, and equip communities to successfully redevelop their underutilized and contaminated properties.

This Community Engagement report was prepared by Adaapta for NVPL through a technical assistance award administered through Kansas State University’s Technical Assistance to Brownfields (KSU TAB) program. This report provides a summary of community engagement activities and resulting input from the residents of Stevensville, which will help inform the final deliverables, the Feasibility Analysis and the Redevelopment Road Map Report. Ultimately, the final deliverables will provide recommendations for NVPL on how to approach the development of the new library facility.

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HISTORY OF STEVENSVILLE, MT

The picturesque town of Stevensville, Montana (elevation 3,320 ft)¹ sits in a valley between the Bitterroot Mountains and the Sapphire Mountains, just east of the Bitterroot River and south of the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge. The town occupies approximately 1 square mile.

Stevensville is the location of many “firsts” for Montana. The first European/American



Figure 1: St. Mary's Church and Mission

¹ USGS, Town of Stevensville Summary Report, <https://edits.nationalmap.gov/apps/gaz-domestic/public/search/names/2413335>



Figure 2: St. Mary's Mission

settlement in Montana, Stevensville was founded in 1841 as St. Mary's Mission. This settlement was established due to the efforts of the Bitterroot Salish people. Through the fur trading routes of 1812, the Bitterroot Salish people heard about the "powerful

medicine" that the Christian Jesuit Missionaries had and sought to bring it to the valley. Over the next nine years, the Bitterroot Salish traveled to St. Louis and visited the home of William Clark (of Lewis and Clark fame, who at the time was the superintendent of Indian Affairs). Clark oversaw the administration of the Montana Territory but could not promise missionaries until funds were available. The Bitterroot Salish people tried again in 1835 and met Father Pierre-Jean De Smet in Council Bluffs in 1839, who promised to fulfill their request. At last, in 1841, the promise was kept, and Father Ravalli arrived to set up the state's first mission, church, and school. The first western agriculture in the state was established by 1845, and included grain fields, apple trees, and ranching. The first pharmacy in the state was also established around the same time.

Another notable man, Major John Owen, arrived in 1850, and set up camp north of St. Mary's. Major Owen and other military forces from the new town defended the mission when it was raided by the Blackfeet tribe. He also established the first water rights in the state, dating back to 1852. Issac Stevens became governor of the territory in 1864, and the settlement was renamed in his honor. In 1891, the Bitterroot Salish people were forced to move to the Flathead Indian Reservation, an area south of Flathead Lake and north of Missoula. In 1893, the county was officially renamed Ravalli County in honor of the first missionary Jesuit Priest and physician. Stevensville was the Ravalli County seat until 1898, when it was moved to Hamilton. More information on the history of Stevensville can be found in the Montana Room in NVPL.

Today, over forty properties in Stevensville are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In addition to these historic places, several new restaurants, coffee shops, banks, insurance companies, grocery stores, and even a local chocolate company are now supporting the growing population. In 2010, the population of Stevensville was 1,888, which grew to 2,002 in 2020, a 6% increase over ten years. Between 2020 and 2023, the population increased to 2,165, an 8% increase in just three years. The rapid growth of Stevensville is expected to slow somewhat over the next 5 years; Esri Business Analyst projects that the population of Stevensville will continue to increase at a rate of .92% per year, down from the 2.67% average growth rate for the last three years. The 2028 projected population is 2,266.²

2 Esri Community Profile for Stevensville, MT

	Stevensville	NVPL Service Area	Ravalli County	Montana	USA
Population	2,165	12,337	46,371	1,122,044	333,287,550
Median Age	48	45.8	49	42	39
Median HH Income	\$46,095	\$73,755	\$61,939	\$63,489	\$72,603
Average HH Income	\$76,074	\$98,989	\$88,237	\$92,605	\$107,008
% of the Population without HS Diploma/GED	5.6%	4.9%	6.9%	5.2%	9.6%
% of the Population with Bachelor's or Advanced Degree	25.1%	30.4%	30.2%	35.7%	36.2%

Table 1: Population and Demographic Data

The NVPL service area is contiguous with the Lone Rock and Stevensville school district boundaries. As of 2022, the population of the NVPL service area was 12,337, and has been increasing over time.³ The median age of the service area, 45.8, is slightly lower than that of the town of Stevensville and the county. The average household income for the NVPL service area - \$98,989 - is higher than the town of Stevensville, Ravalli County, and the state. NVPL service area residents also are more likely to have a high school diploma or GED than residents of Stevensville or Ravalli County as a whole.⁴

As of 2023, there are 93,648 items in NVPL's collection, with 73,644 items checked out. According to the 2023 annual report, NVPL received 35,287 visits throughout last year, which is almost three times the amount of people in the district. To date, NVPL has 3,722 people holding



Figure 3: 2023 NVPL Annual Report

3 United States Census Bureau Data from 2022

4 Esri, 2022, Population and Demographic Data for Ravalli County, Montana, and the US

library cards, and in 2023 the NVPL lent 13,640 items to other libraries and received 17,517 items upon patron request.

BACKGROUND OF NVPL



Figure 4: Aerial View of the Library

NVPL is currently located in the historic Rasmussen Building at 208 Main Street in downtown Stevensville. The library owns the building. Parts of the Rasmussen building were constructed in 1910 and 1940 and then remodeled and expanded in the 1960s. Before NVPL moved into the building in 1991, it had been used as a restaurant, a bakery, a grocery store, an electric repair shop, a home décor retail store, and housing. NVPL has made structural and aesthetic improvements to the building over the years but still faces significant challenges with structural integrity, building layout, drainage, mold, and insufficient parking. After 30 years of dedicated service to the community, NVPL is no longer able to meet the needs of its patrons in its current location.

In 2022, NVPL hired MMW Architects to prepare a Library Master Plan to help plan for the future of NVPL. The Master Plan report detailed the reasons the current library location is no longer serving the visitor's needs; including the building's age, condition, size, lack of parking, and other site constraints. Based on the findings from the Master Plan report and the estimated cost of remodeling or adding on to the existing building, the team determined that building a new library would be the best option. MMW Architects conducted an existing conditions analysis of the current library building and solicited feedback from community members and NVPL patrons to inform the design of the new library. Some of the most noteworthy feedback of the Master Plan includes the following:



Figure 5: View of Library from Main Street

- There is a lack of private space where individuals and small groups can work and talk without disrupting other patrons. Additionally, the lack of separation between child/ teen areas and the rest of the library creates conflict (Figure 6).
- Staff do not have appropriate office areas and are overheard while doing general library tasks. Some offices have been made from former bathrooms.
- Structural issues limit the number and size of bookshelves the building can contain (Figure 7).
- The building has a negative slope, bringing water back towards it, causing flooding and rot.



Figure 6: Lack of separation between areas



Figure 7: Limited Space



Figure 8: Tripping Hazards



Figure 9: 17-inch step up is not ADA accessible

- Lack of storage impacts the tidiness of the library and mismatching carpet, which creates tripping hazards and makes the space feel cluttered (Figure 8).
- The current location is on Main Street; however, it does not have much outdoor space where patrons can eat lunch outside or do outdoor science experiments for kids.
- As the current location is on Main Street, there is currently not enough parking, and the spaces that exist require patrons to back out onto Main Street.
- Not all emergency exits, tall bookshelves, and parking spaces are ADA accessible (Figure 9).
- Structural issues make the upstairs unusable; additionally, the space would require substantial improvements to be useable (Figures 10 and 11).

In the spring and summer of 2023, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) helped NVPL determine the status of any environmental conditions at the library by conducting a Phase I and a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment (ESA). These assessments look at the history of the building and test samples to determine what contamination may be present, if any. Results of the MDEQ's ESAs found small amounts of asbestos and lead-based paint present in inaccessible areas. No other significant environmental concerns were identified. It is important to note that these materials do not threaten people who visit or work at the library, but they will need to be removed before any renovations can occur to the 6,815 square foot building.



Figure 10: Upstairs Room



Figure 11: Upstairs Room filled with insulation

PROPOSED LIBRARY LOCATIONS



Figure 12: Park Site Plan

Due to the challenges associated with the condition and size of the existing building, as well as the environmental concerns, NVPL Board was considering two locations for the site of a new library. The first location is the old softball fields at Lewis and Clark Park, 306 W 2nd Street, which is currently owned by the Town of Stevensville (“the Park Site”). The Park Site is three blocks from the current library location with ample room for additional parking, and is also connected to city sewer and water. The Park Site is 3.4 acres, with around 2.2 acres remaining for amenities or open space after construction of the building and parking.

This second site (“the School Site”) is located at 616 Park Avenue, around 0.8 miles south of the existing library and 0.1 miles south of the Stevensville public school complex. The School Site is 2.5 acres in total with around 1 acre left for amenities after the building and parking are constructed. The School Site is currently owned by the Stevensville School District, and contains a house built in 1936 that has historically been used as teacher housing. The house is on well water and a septic tank for sewer, and could be costly to tie into the town water and sewer utilities. One advantage of the School Site is its proximity to the school, improving student accessibility to library resources; however, the school already has its own library, which may limit the number of students who choose to use the public library.

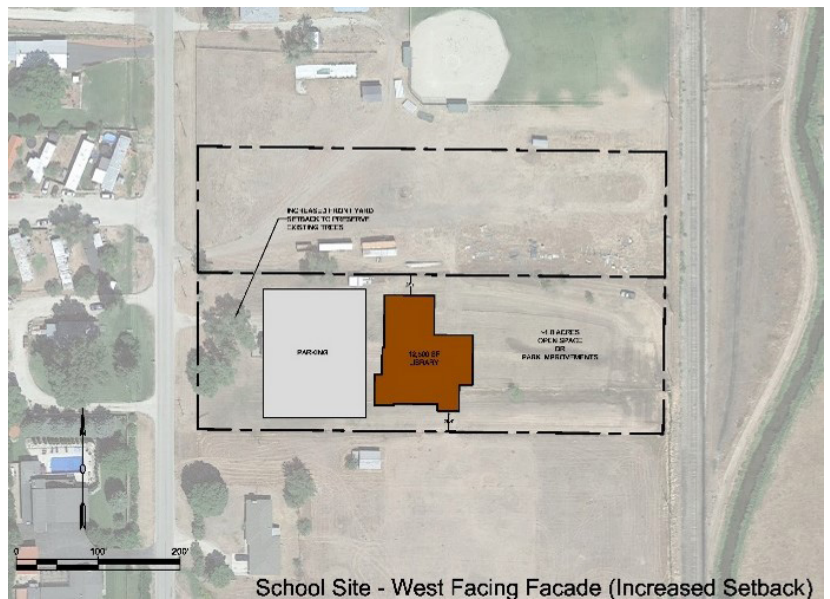


Figure 13: School Site Plan

SITE VISIT SUMMARY

Tour of Existing Library and Potential Sites

On Wednesday, October 25th, 2023, Adaapta team members Kate Lucas and Michelle Howard visited downtown Stevensville and the historic St. Mary's Church and mission area before arriving at NVPL to meet with the Library Board and Montana DEQ. Library staff led a tour of the library followed by tours of the Park Site and the School Site led by the library board.



Figure 14: Lewis and Clark Park

After lunch the Adaapta team was invited to the board meeting at the library's community room. The Adaapta team was introduced to the other board members. The board discussed the current NVPL programs and the Montana Tamarack meeting, an annual meeting for library board members from across the state. The meeting concluded with the Adaapta team reviewing roles for the evening's open house.



Figure 15: School Site

Community Open House

At 6 p.m., the team reconvened to kick off the open house for NVPL. The purpose of the open house was to present the results of the environmental investigations, share the design for the new library building, solicit feedback on the two potential sites, and gather input on the type of amenities library patrons would like to see at the new location. The open house began with an introduction to the KSU TAB program and Adaapta team members, a brief summary of brownfields and underutilized property,

and an overview of the project deliverables, including a feasibility analysis of the two new library locations and redevelopment roadmap that includes potential funding sources. Adaapta concluded the introductory presentation by providing a brief explanation of the meeting's activities. Around 20 to 30 people attended the meeting despite the first snowstorm of the season. All age groups were represented, including a few young children.

Five stations were set up around the perimeter of the library community room and were staffed by members of NVPL board, MT DEQ, and Adaapta. The contents of each station are summarized below; PDFs of Stations 1-3 have been attached to this report as Attachment A.

1. Existing Conditions Board – provided an overview of the existing conditions analysis included in the Library Master Plan conducted by MMW Architects and ReThinking Libraries as well as the current environmental and structural issues.
2. Library Master Plan – provided an overview of the proposed new building design created by MMW Architects and ReThinking Libraries, which could be accommodated on either the Park Site or the School Site.
3. Comparison of the Park Site and the School Site – included two site plans (shown in Figures 12 and 13 of this report) that showed the proposed library footprint as prepared by MMW Architects on both sites. This board also included a short list of pros and cons for each site.
4. Interactive Planning Activity – participants were invited to pin site amenity drawings to their preferred site for the library to create their ideal library site configuration.
5. Reuse Ideas for the Existing Library Building – participants were invited to write down their preferred reuse for the existing library building on a sticky note and add it to the board.

Feedback boxes and notecards were located at most stations. A summary of the input received is included below.

Community Engagement Results

Feedback from Station 1 - Existing Conditions

Colleen Owen with Montana DEQ shared information about existing environmental conditions with attendees and was on site to answer any questions about environmental concerns. No written feedback was received at this station.

Feedback from Station 2 - Library Master Plan

In August 2023, MMW Architects and library consultants from ReThinking provided NVPL with a Master Plan vision for a new library, which was summarized at the meeting

at Station 2. The master plan included a video that was played at the open house and is also available on NVPL website under Building a Better Library. Feedback from this station included the following comments:

- Like the open floor plans
- Looks like it's designed for long-term use
- I think you should build a building not to impress the public but more practical for expensive upkeep.
- Solar Options? Laura knows some grants (maybe post-construction)
- Great looking library. Would like to see more rustic elements in the exterior/interior, like a faux fireplace giving heat but not real fire.

Feedback from Station 3 – Comparison of Sites

Many of the community members who attended the open house were in favor of the Lewis and Clark location. Feedback received on the future location of the library included:

- The school site is rather far removed from downtown. May be hard to find. Perhaps signs on the streets could help direct library visitors.
- The park site seems to make the most sense due to the better location.
- Lewis and Clark Park would be ideal! Let's try to make it happen!
- Love the park!
- I vote for Lewis & Clark Park Site. H2O & Sewer are very important.
- Where and how will the sewer go and be paid for at the school site?
- Park site is preferable, but there might be pushback from the public about using the land next to the river. It had great visibility and was in a central location.
- The park site seems better in terms of easy walking distance from downtown. It's also better in that the sewer and water are already available.
- I like the Park Site for its proximity to downtown.
- Walkable distance from town.

Feedback from Station 4 – Interactive Planning Activity

At the fourth station, there were two maps of each site, one of the Lewis and Clark Park location and the other of the school site. The community was asked to envision where they would like to see the library to be located on each site and what additional amenities they would like to see located near the library. Community members had the choice of adding a community garden, a meditation path, benches, trees, fountain,

amphitheater, gazebo, parking, or another playground.

After adding their personal touches to the locations, participants were able to provide feedback, which included the following:

- Library on native lands and would like to see teepees or some sculpture to remember.
- Like the simple and plain green open space near the library at the park location.
- Love the green space! A native garden, maze, and walking paths would be amazing!
- Green space could be better for Saturday Farmers Market & Winter Market (outdoor) than the current street.
- Would still be able to use the park for the Creamery Picnic.



Figure 16: Planning Activity at Park Site



Figure 17: Planning Activity at School Site

Feedback from Station 5 – Ideas for Reuse of the Current Library

The last station was a blank board where attendees could write down their ideas for reuse of the current downtown library location after the new library opens. The list of community ideas is as follows:

- 6 attendees suggested a Children’s Center/ Theater or play or even a civic gathering place for adults and children.

- 2 people want the library to stay where it is and be remodeled.
- 2 people suggested an art gallery.
- Apartments above
- No more bars
- Park
- DMV
- Laundromat Site on Mainstreet

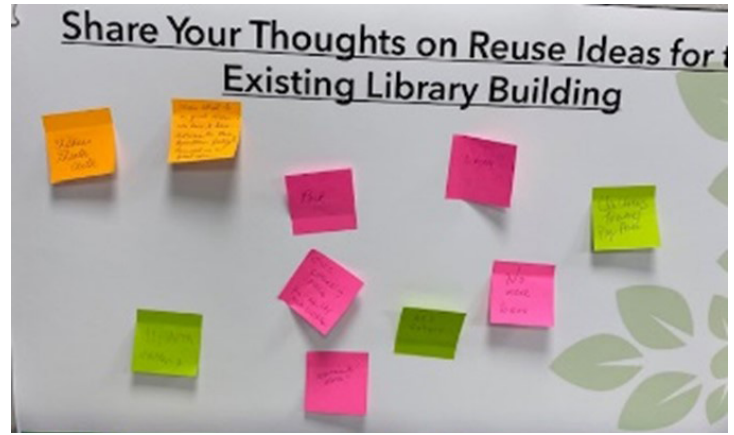


Figure 18: Reuse Ideas for Existing Library Building

ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

Following the site visit, Adaapta developed an online survey to solicit input from residents who could not attend the meeting. The online survey was posted on NVPL’s webpage for 3 weeks, from the beginning of January until the middle of January. There were 59 responses to the survey, although not all respondents answered every question. Four of the fourteen questions were personal information to verify the validity of the survey; this information has been excluded to protect the privacy of the respondents. The survey questions and responses are detailed below:

1. The Existing Conditions Board provides an overview of the environmental conditions of the library and the results of the existing conditions survey conducted for the NVPL Master Plan. Do you have any feedback on the existing conditions of the current library building?

A total of thirty-one responses were received. Of these, nine indicated that they agreed with the information presented in the Existing Conditions Board and had no additional feedback. Eleven provided additional feedback about the condition of the building, including their own experiences with mold and mildew smells, lack of adequate lighting, lack of space for desired programming, accessibility, and safety. Five respondents explicitly mentioned the age of the building and the need for renovations to bring it to a modern standard, and six respondents expressed concern about the costs associated with constructing a new library facility compared to renovating the existing facility. For a complete list of the feedback received, refer to Attachment B.

2. How well does the existing library building serve your needs?

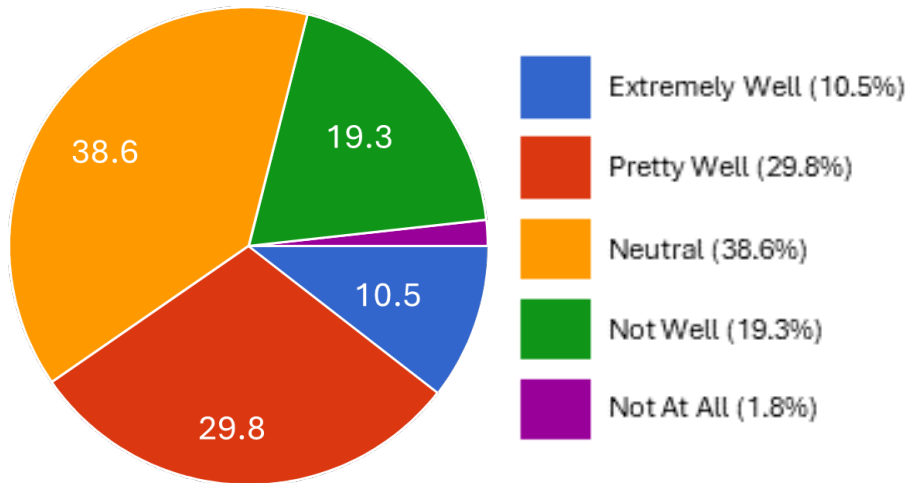


Figure 19: Question 2 Responses

Out of 57 responses, 60% of people expressed that the library building is not serving their needs or could be serving their needs better.

3. Why does or doesn't the existing library building serve your needs?

A total of 42 respondents provided feedback on this question. Of these, 24 respondents said that the current library meets their needs, while 13 said the current library does not because of the lack of space for more books, programming, or the age of the building. 5 respondents gave unrelated answers or indicated that they never use the library.

4. The Library Master Plan Board was provided with a link explaining the proposed design for the new library building. The full Library Master Plan can be viewed on NVPL's website. Do you have any feedback on the proposed design for the new library building?

In summary, 10 NVPL patrons liked or agreed with the library Master Plan. 19 of the other NVPL patrons who responded had detailed critical feedback including concerns about the energy efficiency and expense of construction for Stevensville, for a total of 29 patrons responding to the question. See Attachment B for detailed critical feedback and concerns.

5. NVPL is currently considering two sites for the new library: Lewis and Clark Park and a site south of Stevensville Public Schools. [Note: a link in the survey showed the proposed building footprint on both sites under consideration.] Which site do you prefer?

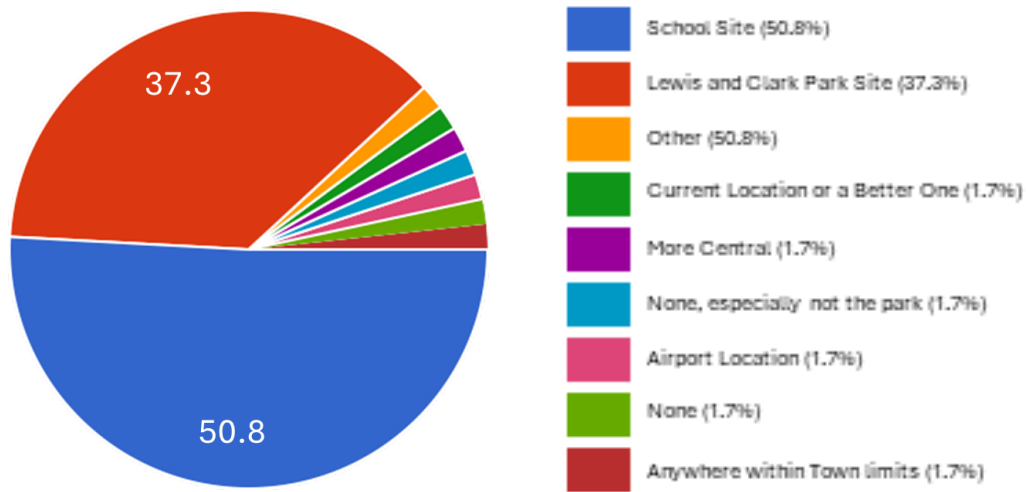


Figure 20: Question 5 Responses

All 59 survey respondents answered this question with just over half expressing a preference for the school site. Respondents were also allowed to write in a different preferred site. Most of these respondents weren't thrilled with either option or preferred for the library to remain in its current location.

6. Why do you prefer that site?

Out of 56 responses, 22 felt that locating the new library building at the park would be taking away open space and not enhancing what is already there. 6 people felt like having the library at the park would be a good idea since there is already sewer and water there, it is close to downtown, and away from the school. A complete list of detailed comments can be viewed in Attachment B.

7. Once the new library building is built, what kind of uses/tenants would you like to see in the existing library building?

Of the respondents, 17 people expressed support for a community center or other community-serving uses, with a particular emphasis on uses that would provide programming for children. 8 respondents expressed support for commercial uses like retail stores and restaurants. 3 respondents were indifferent to the end use, and one respondent thought that the library should remain. 8 additional respondents provided feedback that was not relevant to the question. One late respondent suggested local churches could use the building if they need the space.

8. What kind of amenities would you like to see near the new library?

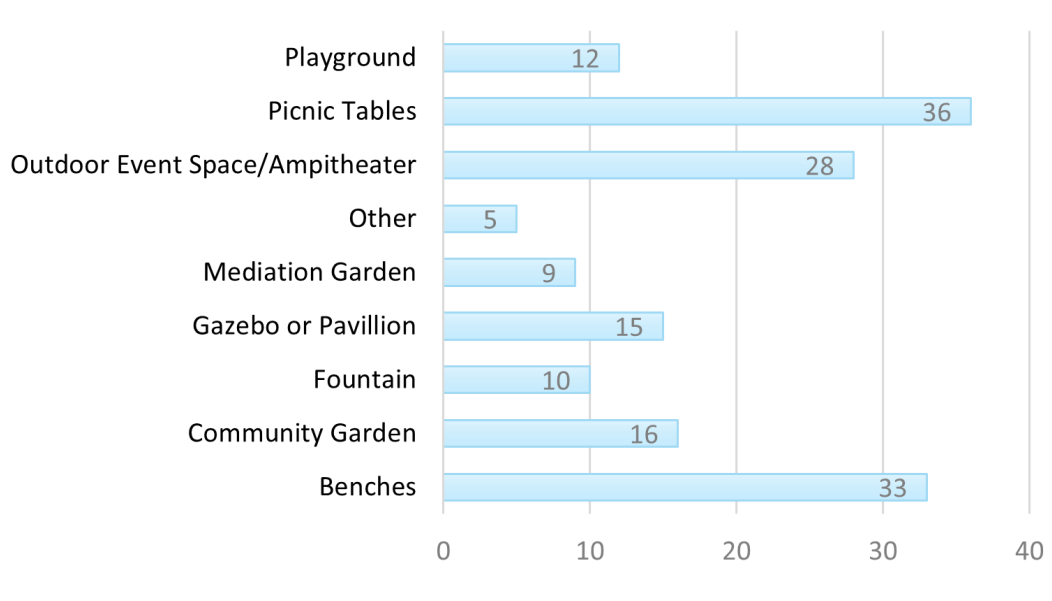


Figure 21: Question 8 Responses

51 respondents selected at least one outdoor amenity that they would like to see at the new library location with most respondents choosing more than one. The most commonly identified amenity was picnic tables, followed by benches. Respondents also expressed support for an outdoor event space or amphitheater, which would likely not be possible on the School Site given its smaller area, but could be feasible at the Park Site.

9. How often do you physically visit the library?

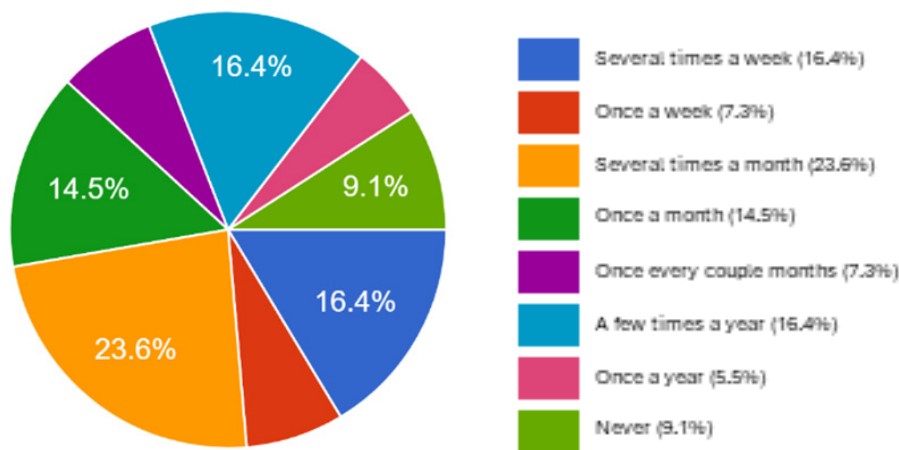


Figure 22: Question 9 Responses

62% of the 55 respondents are frequent to somewhat frequent visitors of the library. 38% of the voters visit the library once every couple of months to never. One patron mentioned that they only use the digital service and never visit the building.

10. What do you use the library for? Check all that apply.

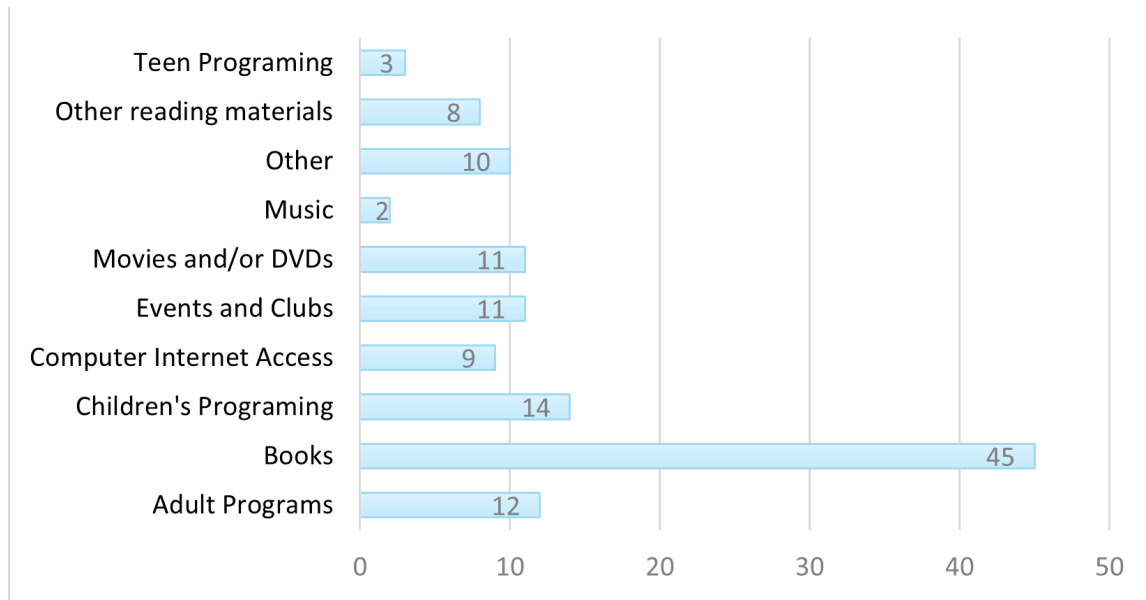


Figure 23: Question 10 Responses

A total of 53 respondents provided feedback, with most people using the library to check out books. Many NVPL patrons voted for more than one usage, with many choosing books and an additional service.

CONCLUSION

Previous studies and input from community members shows that NVPL has outgrown its current location and space. The lack of parking, size limitations, lack of ADA access, and structural issues at the current building are a challenge, which can only be expected to grow as the library continues to age and the population of NVPL's service area continues to grow. The Park Site is likely a more affordable future location for the library, as it is already connected to municipal sewer and water, and it is close to the existing library location and other recreational amenities. The School Site would need to be connected to municipal water and sewer and is farther from the existing library; however, it is close to the Stevensville public school complex and received more support from online survey respondents. Further analysis of the feasibility of the Park Site and the School Site will be provided in a follow-up report, along with two additional parcels that were identified by NVPL after the community engagement survey closed.

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