

## ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN LOOKING AT CONVERTING A BUILDING WHICH WAS ORIGINALLY CONSTRUCTED FOR ANOTHER PURPOSE INTO A LIBRARY:

From time to time a library administrator and board may be faced with making a decision about conversion of a structure originally built for another purpose. Often, such buildings as markets, department stores, banks, savings and loan institutions, or post offices have the potential of being easily converted into a library. Sometimes this can provide the most economical method of gaining desired space in an attractive location or securing a sound structure for a library presently housed in a building with major deficiencies. As building costs continue to rise, this may be a particularly attractive alternative when compared with the cost of constructing a new building—providing the evaluation is based on realistic figures for purchase and remodeling.

First step: Determine whether or not such a building now exists or may become available in the near future. In a small community, the library administrator is often aware of most, if not all, possibilities. Or, a reliable commercial realtor, or a local government official responsible for obtaining rights-of-way or evaluating property, might be consulted. A negative answer from such sources will usually mean that this alternative holds little promise. However, a positive response may mean the library administrator might proceed on another survey with the following criteria in mind.

### Usable Space:

Any existing structure considered for conversion should meet the library's long-term space needs. In other words, does the gross area projected in the space needs assessment compare favorably with the gross area in the building under consideration?

### Efficiency of Space:

Do columns and load-bearing walls permit flexibility in the arrangement of collections, user accommodations, services, and library personnel? Most commercial and retail buildings are fairly open in concept and, therefore, have advantages for library use. If, on the other hand, the building uses load-bearing walls; bookstacks, readers, and personnel may be forced to use an unsatisfactory layout. The building then becomes much less attractive as a solution, and, regardless of other merits, such buildings almost always result in higher operating costs.

### Physical Condition of the Structure:

The condition of the building also is an important consideration. It's wise to have the building analyzed by architects and engineers.

How much remodeling will be required? Some buildings may offer adequate space, but because their original purposes were quite different, lighting and mechanical equipment may be inadequate and need to be replaced. Restrooms may also pose a problem. In commercial buildings, restrooms often are located near the rear of the building, where they may be far removed from supervision points, such as the circulation desk.

Is the structure sound? Will the floor withstand the 150 pounds per square foot weight of loaded book shelving? Are the ceilings tall enough to accommodate the full-height bookstacks and still allow at least 12-18 inches between the top of the shelving unit and the ceiling for proper dispersal of light into stacks? Are the mechanical and electrical systems in good working order and adequate for the library's needs? Is electrical service available in areas likely to support automated equipment? Are there sufficient outlets where the circulation desk or technical services are likely to be? Are there existing provisions for data transmission, both within the structure and from the structure to other remote locations? Does the building meet the barrier-free ADA access requirements for the handicapped?

The change of use may mean the building has to meet more stringent code requirements. Often, if the use of an existing building or structure is changed and the requirements for the new use are more stringent than those for the previous use, the building or structure will have to comply with the requirements for the new use. For libraries, this becomes especially important regarding floor loading requirements. The requirement that library floors withstand an average live load of 150 pounds per square foot is exceptional; few building types have to meet so stringent a requirement. Any structure which had to have its floors reinforced in order to meet the requirement would do so at considerable cost.

### Accessibility:

Buildings converted to new uses would be subject to the same building codes that apply to handicapped accessibility on remodeled projects. Usually, if the conversion involves remodeling of more than a certain percentage of the building, then the entire building must be accessible. Remodeling will often require that accessibility requirements apply at least to an entrance, an exit, and a toilet facility. The costs for any required modifications can be an important consideration.

### Site and Location:

How well does the site meet the location criteria? In other words, is the building large enough, and its location easily accessible to a majority of the library's users, present and future?

Future Expansion:

Another issue to consider is how well the structure will meet both present and future needs for the library. If the total square footage is less than that projected for the 20-year period, both the building and the site will need to be examined critically in terms of suitability for a future addition or additions.

Costs:

The cost of considering converting a structure built originally for another purpose will include the initial purchase price, expense of remodeling, and expansion, either now or in the future. An architect would need to be consulted for an estimate on the cost of remodeling.