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ROCHESTER BRANCH LIBRARIES

FOCUSING FOR THE FUTURE

Prepared for:
The Rochester Public Library

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SUMMARY

In May 2000, the Rochester Public Library (RPL) engaged CGR to undertake a study that would provide a strategic overview to guide the future of the branch system in general, and specific branches in particular, for the next ten years. Given the available funding and time constraints for the study, the RPL and CGR agreed that the primary objective for the study would be to provide a roadmap that the RPL could use to formulate action plans for using the fiscal resources available to the RPL as efficiently as possible so that the branch system could fulfill its mission.

Observation: The community lacks a clear consensus on what branch libraries should be or do.

Within a few weeks after initiating the study, it became clear to CGR that a major challenge facing the RPL is that the Rochester community lacks a clear consensus on what branch libraries should be or do. CGR interviewed over 40 library and community leaders during the project, and virtually every person had a different definition of “what” branches can or should be and do. As an example, one of the key phrases in the current RPL Mission Statement states that the system of libraries assists the city and county in “meeting the needs of the community”. However, CGR discovered many different viewpoints as to how libraries can or could “meet the needs of the community”.

Recommendation: The RPL should develop strategies based on both general and specific roles for the branch libraries.

Thus, the first task for CGR was to identify a methodology that the RPL could use to objectively categorize the roles, or functions, that libraries can or should play within the community. As a result of this work, CGR recommends that the RPL should develop its strategies based upon recognition of both the general roles branch libraries play in the larger community as measured across three dimensions of community living: intellectual, physical and sociological (as defined by CGR in the report), and the specific

types of services that the American Library Association (ALA) has recommended that libraries focus on as specific service objectives.

CGR believes that making a general assessment of the role of a branch using the dimensions described in the report will identify how that branch can be most effective in its particular community. Moreover, making a specific assessment of the specialized type(s) of services to be offered by that branch will help insure that resources are directed to meet specific service objectives linked to community needs that can best be met by the branch library.

Observation:
Currently, the branches are trying to be too many things for too many people.

One consequence of this approach to planning will be the need for the RPL to rethink its overall approach to the branch system. Once specific characteristics and needs of the various city neighborhoods are more intentionally factored into the assessment of the functions of each branch, it will become clear that each branch should become more specialized. CGR's observation is that currently, the branches are trying to be too many things for too many people. This has the effect of diluting resources, and makes it difficult to remain focused on doing an excellent job at accomplishing priority goals.

Recommendation:
Branches should focus on a limited number of key services.

CGR recommends that the RPL should develop strategies for the branch system that focus on providing a limited number of key services that the branches are in a unique position to provide in the community. The branches cannot be, nor should they try to be, miniature versions of the central library. Further, the branches are continuously subjected to demands from within the community to expand services, or provide specialized services to segments of the population to help meet other community objectives. However, it makes strategic sense to encourage individual branches to become centers of excellence in just a few key service areas, and to encourage each branch to stay focused on a long term commitment to those services that best reflect the needs of the specific community that it serves.

Another consequence of this approach to planning is that RPL and city leaders will need to recognize both the need and the benefit of identifying and incorporating a wide range of variables into developing strategies for specific branch buildings. In short, "making good decisions about branches is not simple." Because libraries affect many dimensions of city living, it is important to

factor as many of those dimensions as possible into the planning process.

Observation: Cost to performance ratios vary widely among the branches.

A major portion of this study is devoted to identifying ways to describe and measure what services branch libraries provide, what those services cost, and to whom those services are provided. CGR collected performance and cost data for a fifteen year period from 1985 through 1999, to identify important trends and to put cost and performance measures for 1999 in the proper context. The report shows how the use of different measures paints very different pictures about how cost effective each branch is in meeting various performance objectives. CGR's analysis shows wide variations in cost to performance ratios among the branches.

Recommendation: Use four cost/performance ratios to identify changes in branches that warrant attention.

CGR looked in particular at four cost/performance ratios that provide a comprehensive assessment of the relative "efficiency" of providing library services. Two performance measures that have been used traditionally to measure efficiency in libraries are: a) "circulation", which is "books lent out" (or more accurately, "items" lent out, since lending includes videos, tapes, etc.) and b) "door count", which is a measure of people actually entering the library to use it in some way. In addition to these measures, CGR developed a "cost per square foot" measure (which is a good indicator of the relationship of staffing to building size) and a "cost per program attendee" (which relates attendance at programs to the total cost of the branch). CGR recommends using these four indicators to identify particular branches that warrant management attention.

Observation: Program attendance has declined significantly in the last 15 years.

One trend that CGR believes should be addressed by the RPL is the significant decline over the past 15 years in attendance in programs offered by the branch libraries. The total number of programs offered in the branches declined from 6,408 in 1985 to 3,701 in 1999 (a 42% drop), while the actual number of program attendees fell even more dramatically, from 55,386 in 1985 to 20,400 in 1999 (a 63% decline). Over the same time period, the number of hours the libraries were open for service increased slightly, as did circulation (door count numbers were not available prior to 1997).

Thus, clearly, a major shift in both resources dedicated to programming and actual programming attendance has taken place.

Yet no one CGR interviewed believed that this change was the result of a specific, intentional policy directive. Rather, it apparently resulted from subtle changes in demands on staff time over the years. The unfortunate irony is that both library professionals and the community leaders recognize that programming, i.e. provision of direct interactive teaching and learning experiences, is the single most important pro-active service a library can offer to link potential library users with all that libraries have to offer. Pro-active programming is quite different than simply keeping libraries open and providing circulation material – these services are primarily reactive in that they meet the demand generated by citizens who have already, for whatever reason, determined that they want to be library users.

***Recommendation:
The RPL should re-evaluate the importance of programs within the branch system.***

CGR recommends that the RPL re-evaluate the importance of programs within the branch system, to determine if it is desirable to shift existing resources to meet new programming objectives, or seek additional resources. CGR suggests that programming will become increasingly important as a way for the branches to counteract the potential drop-off in demand for traditional information and circulation material services caused by universal, inexpensive access to internet and e-book technology over the next five years.

Two critical questions that CGR posed in the study were “who uses the branch libraries” (i.e. who are the current customers), and “who could potentially use the branch libraries” (i.e. who are potential customers). CGR was able to infer some of the characteristics of these two populations from census data and from data about branch library users obtained in a detailed survey conducted in 1996 for the RPL. More importantly, however, CGR was also able to measure actual library users by utilizing library patron information (based upon the electronic library card database) and plotting this information onto base maps using CGR’s geographic information systems (GIS) expertise. While the scope of the study limited the extent of this analysis, CGR identified several potentially significant findings.

- ❖ *Potential Cardholders.* CGR estimates that approximately 52% of the population in the city who would qualify for a library card (i.e. they meet the minimum age requirement) actually have a card. This

means that there are approximately 90,000 city residents, ages 6 and up, who could become cardholders (and by inference could become more engaged with libraries).

- ❖ *Potential Neighborhood Branch Users.* Second, in a detailed study of the library usage characteristics of the population surrounding a specific branch (the Arnett branch was selected for this study), CGR discovered that the belief that a city branch library primarily serves its “neighborhood” needs to be re-examined. In light of what CGR found for Arnett, it appears that the city branches do not function as the information “magnet” for their neighborhood as strongly as the traditional model suggests. For example, 66% of the people who hold Arnett library cards live more than 1/2 mile from the library itself (1/2 mile is a reasonable outer limit for walking to a branch). 30% live more than a mile from the library. An even more interesting indicator is that, for a two-week sample period, 51% of those patrons who live within 1/2 mile of Arnett and who took materials out of any library took the materials out of a library other than Arnett. Within a 1-mile radius of Arnett, 66% of those who took out materials from any library did not take these materials out of Arnett.

Observation: Data suggests that large segments of the population do not utilize their neighborhood branch library.

Recommendation: The RPL should develop strategies to encourage more residents to use their neighborhood branch library.

These findings have important implications for developing strategies for the future of the branches. For example, if it is important to the RPL that the branches provide a critical link to residents in their neighborhoods, the RPL needs to find out why apparently large numbers of neighborhood residents do not use the local branch to take out material. This indicator, along with the decline in program attendance, suggests that the value of branches within neighborhoods could be significantly improved by targeted marketing strategies that create links with the population that is not utilizing the branch.

If, as is likely, the RPL is faced with continuing demands to improve its cost to performance ratios to meet the city’s budget requirements, the RPL could pro-actively choose to either decrease the numerator (costs) or improve the denominator (performance measures). If the RPL desires to increase its performance measures, then CGR recommends a proactive strategy to identify the target populations within the service area of each specific branch who could and should be utilizing that

branch, and specific marketing to attract those residents to utilize the branch. Four primary performance indicators that would indicate the success of these programs would be: increased door count, increased number of cardholders, increased circulation to neighborhood residents and increased attendance at programs.

Given limited resources, the RPL will need to consider shifting costs as it moves to implement new strategies.

Planning for the future will also require the RPL to develop strategies that can be accomplished with limited financial resources. For the past fifteen years, the City has allocated approximately 1% of its annual budget to the branch system. If this trend continues into the future, CGR estimates that the RPL could reasonably plan on receiving about \$3.5 to \$3.6 million, adjusted forward for inflation, to spend within the branch system. Since this is what it costs to run the branch system as it exists today, the implication is that unless new sources of funds are found for the branch system, if the RPL chooses to re-focus its priorities for branches (as recommended in this report), any new spending in one area will require corresponding cost reductions in another area. This report offers some examples of the types of trade-offs that could be made to free up some resources for the RPL to use on new strategic initiatives.

This report gives the framework for identifying how to develop specific plans for each branch.

Finally, several of those interviewed indicated the desire for this study to provide specific recommendations for future investments in the branch system. However, it was clearly recognized at the outset that the scope of the report limited the amount of data that could be collected and analyzed. Thus, CGR designed this report to explain the logic of how to collect and organize the data and information needed to develop specific plans for each existing branch and to identify where branches and/or other types of services should be considered.

As illustrated in this report, many key policy and mission decisions that will significantly affect specific action plans for the branches have yet to be made. Thus, CGR believes that the RPL needs to engage in a series of “if-then” questions such as those included in this report. Specific plans for individual branches and/or other facilities need to be put on hold until RPL and city leaders have developed a common set of goals and objectives for the branches that can be used to direct how the “if-then” questions should be resolved and converted into specific recommendations.

CGR has developed a sample branch management plan to illustrate how to use the framework.

In order to illustrate how this report could be used by the RPL to develop specific strategies and then action plans, CGR prepared a sample branch management plan (attached as Appendix A). However, this sample plan is intended to be illustrative only. The plan's conclusions could only be based on the data and information CGR collected for this report. CGR had to make certain assumptions and projections, such as patron usage patterns for every branch, without the benefit of sufficient data or information to ensure that the assumptions and projections were valid. CGR also made its own assertions as to what key missions and objectives of the branches might be, without consulting the RPL staff or community leaders. Thus, this sample plan may differ significantly from a plan that would come out of a public planning process.

The RPL should insure that specific action plans are developed through a collaborative process with the community.

The RPL should develop its actual specific recommendations through a process which insures that complete and accurate data is collected. These data should then be incorporated into an action plan that includes RPL and city leaders (the mayor and city council) and community leaders from the specific communities of each branch which might be affected by any proposed changes. The CGR sample plan might be a starting point for the community discussions. However, CGR believes that it is most critical for the RPL to identify a small number of unifying themes around which to coalesce enthusiasm for a higher level of involvement with and commitment to branch libraries within the city. The key building block for the future needs to be a concentrated focus on directing the branches to become centers of excellence in service areas that uniquely meet the needs of the neighborhoods they serve as well as providing general library services to the greater Rochester community.

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PART 1 – FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTION 1 – What Is A Branch Library?

According to Webster’s dictionary, a library is “a place in which books, manuscripts, musical scores, or other literary and artistic materials are kept for use but not for sale, a collection of literary or artistic materials, or an institution for the custody or administration of such a collection.” However, the definitions found by CGR both in interviews and in research were much more complex and varied. Since this study focused on the RPL branch system, CGR asked city and library officials “what is the role of a branch library, and what is your ideal of what a branch library should be?” Here are some responses that illustrate the range of how leaders in the community view branches:

“Libraries are places to get information”,

“Branches are in the book business”,

“Branch libraries are part of the bundle of services people expect in their neighborhoods,”

“A branch library is a community resource center”,

“Branches of the future are not going to be community or social centers”,

“A branch library exists to help people find the information they need and to promote reading”,

“My idea is that the branch library of the future would be like a Borders bookstore in the neighborhood”,

“Libraries play a crucial role as a civilizing effect in urban culture”.

Each of these statements illuminates a different facet of the complex set of values and visions imbedded in what libraries, and in this case branch libraries, are expected or desired to be. Some of these expectations are complementary, some stand alone, and some are contradictory. But somehow, successful strategies for the future of the branches need to address the entire range of ideas expressed in these statements.

Is it possible to obtain a simple, workable definition of a branch library to serve as a cornerstone upon which to build layers of understanding? A good starting point can be found in the City of Rochester Annual Budget section on Libraries. The Rochester City Council funds 10 branches, including related central administrative costs, through a budget for what is called the “Community Library”.

The budget states that the role of the Community Library (i.e. the branches) is to provide “convenient access” to “library services”. “Convenient access” clearly has implications regarding both number and location of branches – a detailed discussion about those factors will be presented in Section 6. What is meant by “library services”? Clearly, one key perspective on what “library services” means is the view of the RPL professional staff and Board of Trustees. The RPL Strategic Framework, developed in December of 1996, sets forth a vision and mission for the RPL (and by inference its branch system), both of which describe library services. In this context, it is worth quoting both the Vision and Mission statements in their entirety.

The RPL Vision – (What we want to become)

The Rochester Public Library is recognized as an essential, nationally-renowned source for the acquisition, organization, retrieval and delivery of information. Skilled and responsive Library staff operate first-rate facilities and have sufficient resources necessary to deliver timely, efficient and highly valued services, programs and materials that enable people to lead more productive, fulfilling lives. The Library is financially secure and uses the most efficient processes and appropriate technologies to provide equal opportunity to gain access to its resources from any location at any time.

The RPL Mission – (Who we are and what we do)

The Rochester Public Library enriches the quality of life in Rochester and Monroe County by providing educational, recreational, aesthetic, and informational materials, services and programs to help people follow their own lines of inquiry and enlightenment. Through a partnership of public and private resources, the Library assists the City and County in

meeting the needs of the community by operating the central and branch libraries, conducting outreach programs and providing services to other libraries. In all its endeavors, the Library maintains and promotes the principles of intellectual freedom and equality of access.

Many of the concepts and ideas incorporated into the Vision and Mission statements will be woven into the discussion throughout this report. But keeping focused on the question of what constitutes “library services”, one key phrase remains an enigma – what does the RPL mean by “meeting the needs of the community”? This is not a trivial question, for the answer goes to the very heart of how the RPL needs to frame its branch strategies for the future.

CGR believes that it is critical that RPL acknowledge and factor into future strategies the multi-dimensional “needs of the community” as they relate to the “role” of a branch library. The key dimensions will be discussed in detail in Section 2. However, to set the framework for that discussion, we will revisit the question of “what is a branch library”.

A branch library is almost universally understood to be a “place”, which implies a building or other facility. However, this only represents an understanding about the library’s place in the physical environment. What came across clearly from interviews is that there are two other equally important environments that a branch library affects - the social environment and the intellectual environment. How are these three dimensions- intellectual, physical and sociological – reflected in the community’s expectations for a branch library?

Here is how the head of a department in the City explained the interplay of these three dimensions: *“A branch library seems to play three roles. In one sense, it is similar to a school, being a community center or gathering place that is considered to be safe and open and free – not associated with any particular cause or program, and hence it is neutral ground for the exchange of ideas. A branch library is also clearly a resource center, primarily for information and/or access to information. Last, a library somehow imparts a sense of pride and belonging to a neighborhood. A library is a deeply rooted symbol of what the neighborhood says about itself that goes far beyond what numbers might say about how the library is actually “used”.”*

There is no question that the branch libraries in the City of Rochester have become key symbols for the communities within which they are located. In a very real sense, these libraries have become “community” libraries (as they are aptly named in the city budget document). In this context, it will be useful to differentiate between a community library, which has the characteristics described above, and a branch library. A branch library can be a community library, but it can also be something different. For example, a regional branch library may not have the same sense of ownership by a neighborhood as a community library. As another example, a very small branch library outlet could be located in a mall, or in a store, which would serve as an information resource center, but would clearly not play the same role as a community library.

To conclude, the starting point for defining a branch library is to recognize that it is a place (the place is usually thought of as being a dedicated building, however, libraries can certainly exist in shared facilities). However, it is a place which provides many different functions for the community that supports the library. These functions will be explored in Section 2.

SECTION 2 - The Role of a Branch Library

Everyone recognizes that a branch library is different from a large, community-wide central library. But branch libraries fulfill a number of roles, or functions within their more localized communities. These functions vary widely, depending on a number of variables, such as size, location, and expectations of the community in which the branch is located. In general, branch libraries play a role in three key dimensions that are the cornerstones of community living: *intellectual, physical and sociological*. Specific components of these dimensions can be identified and should be factored into the calculus for making investment decisions for individual branches and the branch system as a whole. These components will be referred to as *general roles*.

It is important to understand that these dimensions and roles as defined by CGR are more overarching than the eight roles identified by the American Library Association in its 1987 manual “Planning and Role Setting for Public Libraries”. In fact, the ALA

has recently supplanted its original eight roles with thirteen “service responses” that describe most of the services provided by public libraries (see the 1998 ALA manual “Planning for Results – A Public Library Transformation Process”). The ALA developed the service response categories to help libraries focus on specific service objectives to be carried out within a library. CGR encourages the RPL to utilize the ALA service objectives in conjunction with CGR’s general role definitions to develop future strategies, as will be discussed in more detail in Sections 4 and 5. The ALA service response categories will be referred to as *specific service objectives*.

A. Roles In The Intellectual Dimension

There appears to be almost universal consensus that a branch library plays a critical role in the *intellectual* fabric of a community. Two strong roles that branches play in this dimension are to:

- I.1. Provide access to the universal body of ideas and information.
- I.2. Answer requests for information.

Less clear is the extent to which branch libraries play a role in educating citizens how to gain access to the universal body of information. The lines begin to blur, and turf wars with other institutions in the community begin to surface when branches take on the role of teaching rather than informing. Historically, and because of the very nature of what they do, librarians have played a teaching role. However, the extent of this role in the individual communities of branches can vary widely. Even though there are a multitude of community resources that are dedicated to teaching, and there are a wide range of options for, and theories about when and what types of skills should be taught to empower citizens to obtain and utilize information (which has traditionally been thought of primarily as teaching reading skills), libraries will continue to play some role to:

- I.3. Teach members of the community how to read and otherwise obtain and utilize information.

How can acknowledging these roles be useful in determining the role of a branch within its community and what resources to

commit to that branch? Several examples will illustrate how these concepts need to be integrated.

First, although a community may agree that a critical role for its branch is to provide access to information (Role I.1.), how that role can be carried out is changing significantly with the universalization of internet access, and with the upcoming e-book technology. Even development of an efficient inter-library loan program such as that created by the Monroe County Library System (MCLS) can change how the universal access function is provided by a branch. A small kiosk type of branch outlet, with a few internet terminals and an efficient pick-up and drop-off system could meet the information access requirements of a community at much lower costs than a standard full-service branch.

As another example, consider how the role of answering requests for information could be carried out in different ways, again primarily driven by changes in technology. In 1999, the Rochester branch librarians reported that they answered approximately 9,500 requests for information over the phone. At an average of 2 minutes per call (a conservative estimate), this equates to 19,000 minutes, or 316 hours, or 45 workdays per year. Spread evenly among the 10 branches, this equates to 4.5 days per branch per year. Should the RPL consider setting up a new system to direct telephone reference questions to the main information center at Rundel? Or, taking an idea suggested by Charles McClure (a leading library authority) at the convocation of the new Bausch & Lomb Building at the RPL, perhaps link up with several library systems to create a regional telephone reference center? Certainly, the technology exists to make such a change. And this would be one way to “free up” time that the branch library staff could use to devote to tasks in different priority areas.

The question of providing access to information for the community is one that has many facets, and a detailed consideration of the issues relating to access will reveal much about the values of the community. For example, if the community expects a branch to “serve its neighborhood”, what exactly does that mean? What if a significant number of neighborhood residents actually go to another library other than

the local library – what does that imply about how well the local branch is “serving” its neighborhood? As another example, how important is the role of a branch libraries in providing access to disenfranchised and underprivileged citizens? Should various branches receive more or less funding depending on their ability to serve the needs of the citizens in the communities in which they are located rather than serving the greater metropolitan area? These are questions that will be raised in Section 3 when data about “Who Is Served” is presented.

B. Roles In The Physical Dimension

Branch libraries, especially if they exist in structures that are identified as distinct facilities, seem to play several key roles in the *physical* fabric of the community. To some extent, the physical and sociological roles of the facility are intertwined, but the emphasis here will be on the physical component.

First, a library is one of the buildings in a community that is viewed as politically neutral, since it is not supported by a special interest group. Other public facilities (notably schools) can also fill this role, so the importance of the library as a community meeting space depends to some extent on the availability of other public meeting spaces in the community. Community events may be those specifically sponsored by the library as a library program, or may be events sponsored by other organizations. In Rochester, non-profit and neighborhood groups frequently use some of the branch libraries for meetings open to the community. Use of branch libraries is regulated by RPL guidelines and procedures.

Libraries are also considered to be safe havens, particularly for children and young adults. Libraries in practice have become drop-off points and/or after school holding centers for kids. This is especially true in Rochester for libraries close to elementary schools. The role of a library as a safe haven will also vary depending on the availability of other facilities in the area which provide the same option, and the need for such sites.

Libraries also reflect public investment in a neighborhood, and, as such are viewed as at least symbolic evidence of the stability of a neighborhood. Whether or not there are spin-off economic benefits due to the actual site of a library is difficult to measure, (i.e. there doesn't seem to be credible evidence that investing in a library at a specific location significantly improves the economic

welfare of the neighborhood). However, the “perception” of the benefits of a library, for example if the library is landscaped nicely in an otherwise more urban and congested neighborhood, is clearly valuable to the community. Thus, the role of the library structure in a neighborhood can vary depending on both the physical impact in its neighborhood and the perceived economic value that the library adds to the neighborhood.

To summarize, libraries can play one or more of the following roles in the physical dimension of the community:

- P.1. Provide a community meeting space for community wide events.
- P.2. Provide a safe haven for community residents, especially children.
- P.3. Provide an investment anchor to the neighborhood.

Of the three dimensions, the physical dimension is the one which is most enduring. The oldest of Rochester’s currently active branches, Monroe, was built in 1932, and there is no reason to think that building will not last for many more decades. Municipal buildings are expected to last for decades, maybe even generations, especially when significant public investments are involved. Thus, both the site and design of freestanding branch libraries are important decisions that require consideration of long-term variables. On the other hand, to the extent that branch libraries are co-located in other establishments, or are intended to meet other roles (such as being primarily an information outlet), and where significant public investment is not required, the physical dimension may play a less important role in defining the role of the branch in the community.

C. Roles In The Sociological Dimension

Branch libraries clearly play important roles in the sociological fabric of a community. Branches reflect the cultures, expectations, values and desires of the communities in which they are located. As such, they are also subject to changing demands for service as the demographics of their communities change over time. What is not easy to identify, however, is to what extent a branch library is formed by the demands and expectations of the community, or to

what extent the branch library can pro-actively influence the community. This is one of the key dilemmas facing library leaders.

One important role a branch library plays is as a gathering place for informal special interest groups. This will be identified as:

S.1. Provide an informal community gathering place.

This role is different than being a community meeting place, which for purposes of this report was discussed as a component of the physical dimension. In this context, an informal special interest group refers to one or more patrons who frequent the library regularly. Sometimes, one or more patrons gather around a favorite table to discuss events or books. Clearly, there are patrons who for years have come in to use the library as a “reading” room, in fact, most branches have set up designated areas that are conducive for “pleasure reading” of newspapers and magazines.

Although branch libraries play an important function as an informal community meeting space, CGR did not find any data or information that could be used to quantify the impact of this role. Anecdotal evidence (which is the best available at this time) suggests that actually only a very small percentage of the population actually uses branch libraries for these activities. And alternatives do exist, as attested to by the popularity of Barnes & Noble and Borders bookstores.

Although Role S.1. applies to the entire community, libraries often have to face a particular set of issues when the library becomes a community gathering place for young adults. Because of the nature of young adults, clusters of them in libraries tend to be noisy and potentially disruptive to other groups of patrons. There is an ongoing debate about the proper role of libraries in meeting the needs of young adults as a gathering place. To the extent that readily available alternatives to the branch library exist, branches can play a greater or lesser role in meeting the needs of that particular segment of the community. It is also important to recognize that the need to commit more or less resources to that age group fluctuates with changes in the demographics of the neighborhood.

A branch library is an integral part of the cluster of services available to residents of the community. This should be identified as role:

- S.2. Take on an integral role as part of the cluster of services available to the community.

But branch libraries also play a unique role in that cluster of services. Their niche is as an information resources provider. Due to design considerations for libraries, the historical evolution of libraries and the specialization of professional staff, libraries have not been expected to play the same role as a community center, or a recreation center, or a day care center, or a school. To the extent that the changing needs of the community require more or less alternative human service activities, there needs to be a dynamic relationship among libraries and other types of services.

How any individual branch library adjusts the types of services it provides is a function of both the changing demographics of its community and the availability of other services in the community to provide for those changing needs. Where the branch library represents the single or one of the few public facilities in the community capable of providing the range of services being demanded, the library may be expected to change roles to meet changing demands. Where the branch library exists within a wide mix of service providers, the branch may be able to focus more clearly on meeting the information dimension needs of the community.

The third key role branch libraries play in their communities in the sociological dimension helping members of the community become better citizens. CGR heard this role expressed in several different ways, but the general intention is that libraries can and should play a role in helping the members of its community improve and grow in society. To some extent, this implies that libraries are places that help their communities gain access to resources which can only be afforded by limited segments of the general population. For example, to use a phrase currently in vogue, libraries are seen as one place to help bridge the “digital divide” that may be separating classes in America. Several of the branch librarians expressed their belief that a key role of libraries is

to provide young and particularly single parents with the skills and library resources to encourage their children to read at an early age.

CGR will define this role as:

- S.3. Provide public resources to help democratize the community.

The extent to which resources need to be devoted towards this role clearly depends on the needs and demographics of individual neighborhoods. These can be described, to some extent, by various census and other community profile statistics, some of which will be presented in Section 3.

D. Summary Of The General Roles

CGR believes that strategies for both the branch system as a whole, and individual branches within the system, should take into account the nine general roles, which fall into three dimensions that the branch libraries affect within their communities, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Nine General Roles for Branch Libraries

Intellectual Dimension

- I.1. Provide access to the universal body of ideas and information.
- I.2. Answer requests for information
- I.3. Teach members of the community how to read and otherwise obtain and utilize information.

Physical Dimension

- P.1. Provide a community meeting space for community wide events.
- P.2. Provide a safe haven for community residents, especially children.
- P.3. Provide an investment anchor to the neighborhood.

Sociological Dimension

- S.1. Provide an informal community gathering place.
- S.2. Take on an integral role as part of the cluster of services available to the community
- S.3. Provide public resources to help democratize the community.

In Section 1, CGR suggested that it is useful to recognize *community* libraries as a distinct subset of branch libraries. CGR proposes

that as a branch library assumes more and more roles in the Physical and Sociological dimensions, that library becomes a community library. It is certainly possible to have a branch library that only fulfills Role I.1., for example, a small kiosk library which is a place to pick up or drop off items, and perhaps with an internet terminal or two. This type of branch library, however, would not be considered a full-fledged community library because it would not fulfill roles in the Physical and Sociological dimensions. On the other hand, a community branch library might play important roles in the Physical and Sociological dimensions, but not be very effective in the Information dimension. Strategic planning for the future of branch libraries in Rochester needs to consider how these nine general roles could and should be fulfilled.

E. Specific Service Objectives Proposed By the American Library Association (ALA)

While the general roles are important variables in determining where and how a branch should function within the context of its local community, more specific service objectives need to be identified to help direct how to allocate resources to activities that should be carried out by the branch. CGR suggests that the thirteen ALA service responses should provide the framework for focusing on specific activities within a branch. The ALA book “Planning for Results” defines each of these service responses in detail, and that book should be a key reference for the RPL as it plans for the future. The following table lists the thirteen services suggested for consideration by the ALA, along with a brief description summarized from “Planning for Results”, pages 59-122.

TABLE 2
The Thirteen ALA Key Library Services

- *Basic Literacy*
Addresses the need to read and to perform other essential daily tasks.
- *Business and Career Information*
Addresses a need for information related to business, careers, work, entrepreneurship, personal finances and obtaining employment.

- *Commons*
Addresses the need of people to meet and interact with others in the community and to participate in public discourse about community issues.
- *Community Referral*
Addresses the need for information related services provided by community agencies and organizations.
- *Consumer Information*
Addresses the need for information to make informed consumer decisions and helps residents become more self sufficient.
- *Cultural Awareness*
Addressed the desire of community residents to gain an understanding of their own cultural heritage and the cultural heritage of others.
- *Current Topics and Titles*
Addresses residents' desire for information about popular cultural and social trends and the desire for satisfying recreational experiences.
- *Formal Learning Support*
Addresses the need to provide students attain their educational goals.
- *General Information*
Addresses the need for information and answers questions on a broad array of topics related to work, school and personal life.
- *Government Information*
Addresses the need for information about elected officials and governmental agencies that enables people to participate in the democratic process.
- *Information Literacy*
Addressed the need for skills related to finding, evaluating and using information effectively.

- *Lifelong Learning*
Addresses the desire for self-directed personal growth and development opportunities.
- *Local History and Genealogy*
Addresses the desire of community residents to know and better understand personal or community heritage.

SECTION 3 – Rochester’s Branch Libraries – Describing What Is

Before considering strategies for the future, it is important to understand the current branch system within the City. For this study, CGR collected a wide range of data from many different sources, in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the activities and costs of the branch system as it exists as of July, 2000. Activity and cost measures were compared over a fifteen-year period, from 1985 through 1999, in order to identify significant trends. In addition, CGR developed, for the first time, activity indicators based upon GIS (geographic information systems) analysis of the MCLS actual user files (both the patron and transaction files). A comprehensive summary of the data used to develop the recommendations in this report is found in Part 2 of this report. This section will provide key summary tables drawn from the data to illustrate what CGR believes are the key points to consider.

CGR’s analysis of the branch library system in the City focused on the ten branches that currently exist as separate facilities. Technically, the RPL has an eleventh branch located in the Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, however, this only has a small, specialized collection which can be considered more of a resource library than a public service branch at this time. The MCLS Extension Services also runs a Bookmobile which serves city residents through its stops at various sites throughout the city. The Bookmobile also serves suburban locations, and is not directly funded through the city budget. A completely comprehensive strategic plan for city branches should consider factoring in bookmobile services as a complement to freestanding city branch services, however, such an assessment was beyond the scope of this study.

One other factor which CGR considered was the impact of having the Rundel and Bausch & Lomb Library buildings (subsequently

referred to as Rundel) located in the center city. As such, Rundel does serve as a walk-in site for many city residents, as well as non-city residents. CGR's analysis of use of city branches by city residents did include the impact of Rundel, however, Rundel was otherwise not considered or included as a branch for purposes of this study.

A. The Physical Plant

There are ten freestanding branch libraries within the city considered to be part of the city's community library system. Some key reference data are listed in Table 3.

TABLE 3
Key Branch Library Building Indicators

<i>Size:</i>	Total Square Footage, All 10 Branches:	81,014 ft ²
	Smallest:	Highland, 3,750 ft ²
	Largest:	Arnett, 12,000 ft ²
<i>Age:</i>	Oldest:	Monroe, Built 1932
	Newest:	Lincoln, Built 1994
<i>Total Capital Invested.*</i>	Since 1934:	\$4,541,181
<i>Total Capital Invested.*</i>	10 Years, 1970-79:	\$1,095,476
	10 Years, 1980-89:	\$987,233
	10 Years, 1990-99:	\$1,617,638

* Includes cash capital for building renovations and improvements including ADA funding, and debt for new structures. Excludes interest for debt. Dollars are not adjusted for inflation. Source: City Fixed Assets Report.

As shown in Table 3, the city has clearly made an ongoing commitment to investing capital funds for both repairs and new facilities, at roughly comparable rates over the last three decades. However, it is important to understand that most of these funds have been concentrated in major investments in one or two buildings in each ten-year cycle. Whether or not the total capital investment has been sufficient to meet all of the potential needs of the facilities is subject to differences of opinion. However, there is general agreement that overall the branch library physical plant is in good condition.

The actual sizes of the current branches are consistent with branches in other comparison cities, as shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Average Size of Branches in Comparison Cities

City	# Branch Buildings	Estimated Average Square Footage	Smallest (ft ²)	Largest (ft ²)
Buffalo, NY	15	7,766	2,234	13,650
Denver, CO	22	8,800	N/A	N/A
Indianapolis, IN	21	8,876	2,560	17,500
Milwaukee, WI	12	15,000	13,500	16,000
Portland, OR	14	8,320	2,204	23,000
Rochester, NY	10	8,550	3,750	12,000

Source: CGR Survey

There are three characteristics of the current facilities, however, that were identified by CGR as having important consequences for future strategic planning purposes: location, interior design constraints and community meeting room facilities.

Location

As shown on a map, the branches are fairly evenly distributed around the city, as a whole. However, if the city were to start with a clean slate and build a new branch system, i.e. if there were no branches as of 2000, and the city wished to build 10 branches, it is likely that the branches would be located differently, for both a general reason and a specific reason.

The general reason can be understood by looking at service area overlay maps.

CGR did not find a consensus among library professionals or those interviewed for this project as to how to define a “service area” of a branch library. One reason this standard is hard to define is the fact that a substantial number of branch users, if not the majority, get there by car. The City Branch Research Report conducted in 1996 did not specifically ask the question whether or not branch users (patrons) walked or drove to the branch where they were surveyed, but in answer to the question “I live in the

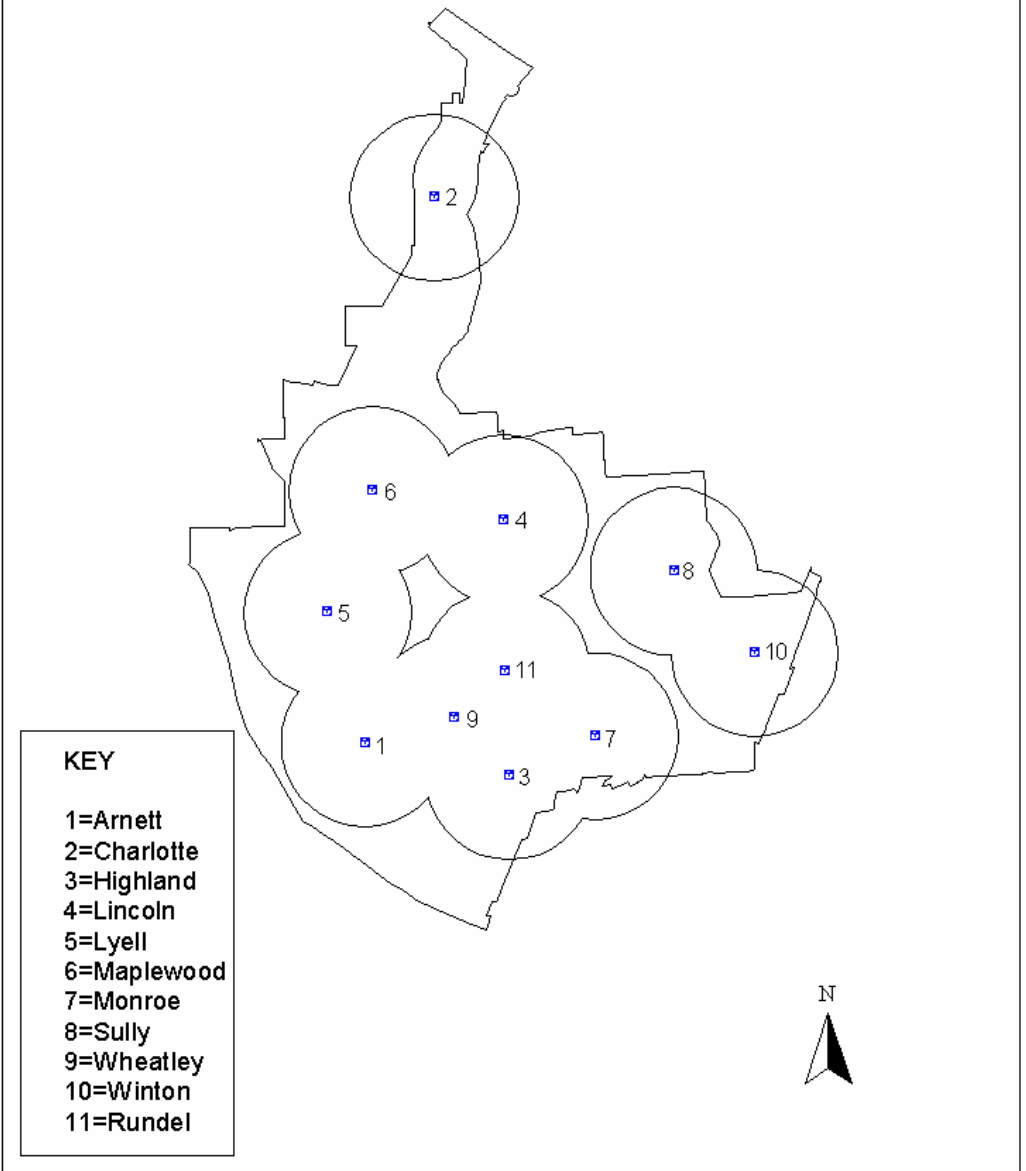
immediate area and can easily walk here”, 48% replied “Yes”. If, as seems reasonable, the “service area” for a city branch is defined as the immediate area around the branch where people feel comfortable walking to it, then the question is, how far will people comfortably walk to a branch? One historical standard that CGR has seen applied is a mile. However, CGR believes, and many of those we interviewed agreed, that one-half mile is a more reasonable outer limit for walking in the city.

Thus, CGR plotted the ten branches and Rundel, and then using GIS tools drew one-half mile radius and one mile radius circles around each point. These circles are simplistic because they do not take into account physical or other barriers that actually affect walking patterns. But the circles do offer a starting point for assessing the impact of the current location of city branches.

Map 1, using a 1 mile radius, shows that there are several clear corridors of the city that do not fall within the 1 mile service area. Overall, within the city boundaries shown (intentionally excluding Durand-Eastman and Genesee Valley Parks, which, although technically included in the land area of the city, do not serve city neighborhoods), approximately 29% of the land area of the city proper is not within a 1-mile walk of a branch.

Branch Library Service Area Map 1

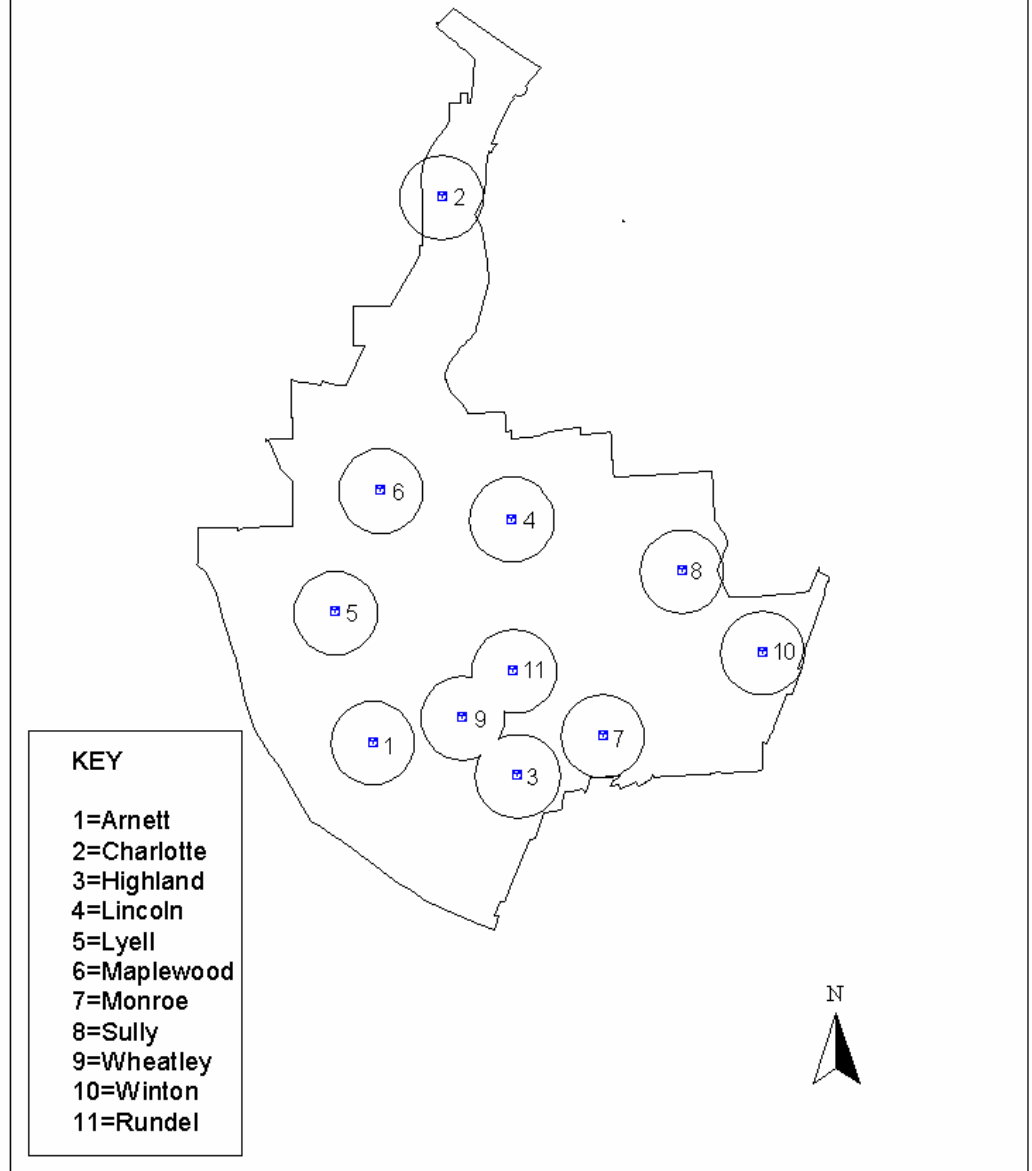
Showing a 1 Mile Radius from Each Branch (Including Rundel)



Map 2, which is based on a $\frac{1}{2}$ mile radius, clearly shows a band sweeping from the northeast through the northwest in particular where which fall outside the service areas as drawn. Using the circles shown in Map 2, about 74% of the land area of the city is located farther than a $\frac{1}{2}$ mile walk from an existing branch library.

Branch Library Service Area Map2

Showing a 1/2 Mile Radius from Each Branch (Including Rundel)



These maps suggest that, even after accounting for the fact that certain sectors of the city are industrial or commercial and thus do not have neighborhoods that could be served by a branch library, it is likely that if ten branches were to be build from scratch in the

city at this point in time, they would likely be distributed differently throughout the city.

A specific reason that branches might be located differently has to do with where branches should be located within general sectors of the city. The current strategies for investing public money are being specifically developed as the details of the City's 2010 Plan are being formulated. However, the 2010 Plan as it has been presented to date incorporates the notion that public investment in facilities should be leveraged to enhance development "nodes" in what are referred to as "urban villages". As the planning criteria for defining "urban villages" are developed, CGR believes it is likely that these criteria will suggest that branches would, in the future, be built at different locations than they have been in the past.

Interior Design Constraints

CGR was not engaged to develop detailed recommendations about the design of or the need to improve current facilities. However, CGR's observations, in conjunction with comments from many of those interviewed, suggest that the flexibility of the branch libraries to accommodate potential changes in the future is limited by the interior design of the buildings. In particular, the older model of having a wide open, single floor facility has helped exacerbate conflicts between noisier user groups and patrons who want and expect the older quiet reading library model. As libraries change to offer programming and information access options in different ways, the interior spaces of the libraries need to be able to accommodate the needs of multiple user groups simultaneously.

Community Meeting Room Facilities

Although CGR consistently heard that a core function of a branch library is to provide a common meeting place for the community, in fact, four of the ten branches currently do not have separate, dedicated community meeting rooms, as shown below. This finding has important implications both for programming and for future capital investments, as discussed in Sections 5 and 6.

TABLE 5
Branches with Meeting Rooms

Branch	Has Separate Meeting Room
Arnett	Y
Charlotte	Y
Highland	N
Lincoln	Y
Lyell	N
Maplewood	Y
Monroe	N
Sully	N
Wheatley	Y
Winton	Y

Source: CGR Site Visits

B. What Services Are Provided

Everyone agrees that the branch libraries provide a wide range of services. The challenge is in trying to measure the services provided in order to relate services to costs. Establishing the relationship between costs and services is a critical management tool, especially if the RPL faces increasing pressure to link costs with results.

There are clearly some community benefits from a branch that are difficult to measure. For example, it is not easy to quantify the importance of roles P.2., “provide a safe haven for community residents” and P.3., “provide an investment anchor to the neighborhood”. In fact, most of the roles in the physical and sociological dimensions do not lend themselves to measurement, and as such, libraries have not developed performance indicators in those areas.

The two major areas where services provided by branch libraries do lend themselves to being measured are information services and programs. CGR collected a number of indicators to quantify the types of activities and services provided by the branches in these areas. A primary source for these indicators was the service report sheets completed by each branch and submitted to central branch administration on a monthly basis. The monthly service reports were available from as far back as 1985, and, except for minor variations, the same data was collected over the entire time span. Thus, the data provide an invaluable insight into how

services provided have changed over time. The yearly totals for each branch are provided in Part 2. Several of the key indicators are used in the following discussion.

Providing Access To Ideas and Information

One of the primary performance indicators used by libraries to measure how they are providing access to ideas and information is the count of items lent out. The common measure used is “circulation”, which is a count of items (which includes books, tapes, videos, etc – anything loaned out) that are loaned from a specific location. Circulation is not based on which branch “owns” an item. Rather it is based on which branch actually loaned the item out to a patron. Thus, if a book owned by Monroe were loaned out through Highland, this would be measured as one item circulated from Highland.

Table 6 shows that, over the fifteen years, circulation for all the branches combined has risen slowly over time, at an annualized rate of a little less than 1% per year.

TABLE 6
Circulation by Branch Libraries

Branch	1985	1990	1995	1999
Arnett	83,459	98,538	79,737	71,998
Charlotte	87,920	141,190	102,496	124,519
Highland	49,107	58,003	99,433	104,806
Lincoln	33,443	43,295	47,618	52,407
Lyell	2,847	39,686	57,975	54,368
Maplewood	95,947	89,976	78,618	66,175
Monroe	76,255	111,810	141,212	150,089
Sully	73,762	53,788	30,899	28,014
Wheatley	40,937	24,787	33,064	37,610
Winton	212,840	204,785	233,117	228,134
Total	756,517	865,858	904,169	918,120

Source: RPL Statistics

What circulation does not measure, of course, is how much patrons access ideas and information within the library itself, without taking out any items. There are only two surrogate measures of this activity.

One measure is the count of people who go into the library. In the last few years, each RPL branch has used door counters to count the number of users who come into each branch. The door count totals for the last three years are shown in Table 7.

TABLE 7
Door Count for Branch Libraries

Branch	1997	1998	1999
Arnett	92,861	88,172	96,652
Charlotte	95,768	97,359	95,669
Highland	78,374	101,167	102,424
Lincoln	70,555	89,579	95,100
Lyell	65,199	66,989	66,312
Maplewood	116,761	100,651	120,663
Monroe	118,936	113,736	123,770
Sully	48,834	48,753	43,856
Wheatley	53,562	73,847	92,873
Winton	182,676	142,083	104,787
Total	923,526	922,336	942,106

Source: RPL Statistics

Another measure of in-building information access has been developed over just the last few years. Branch libraries have begun to provide free access to the Internet through in-library terminals. In the City of Rochester, nearly all of the branches also provide computer access to a database of information about the city and individual neighborhoods through a dedicated Neighbors Building Neighbors (NBN) computer. Until the last few months, computer usage has been counted manually, thus individual branch statistics are subject to a wide variation. Electronic counting software has recently been installed at each of the branches, so that future usage counts will be more accurate. However, the overall usage count within the system shown in Table 8 gives a good indication of the rapid growth of interest in using computers within the branches to access ideas and information.

TABLE 8
Count of Internet/NBN Computer Usage Within Branches
 (Total for All Branches)

Year	Internet/NBN Computer Use
1999	21,112
1998	8,039
1997	3,161
1996	1,967
1995	814

Source: RPL Statistics

Since the public can only obtain access to the resources available in a library when it is open (note – the one exception to this is that the MCLS catalog and catalog search database is accessible around the clock), hours of operation are an important measure of the ability to access ideas and information. Within the RPL system, the total hours for which the branches have been open to the public has also grown slowly over the past fifteen years, as shown in Table 9.

TABLE 9
Hours Open – Branch System
 (Total for All Branches)

Year	Total Hours Open for the Year
1999	21,756
1995	20,079
1990	20,195
1985	17,817

Source: RPL Statistics

Another measure of how well a branch provides access to ideas and information is the size of its collection. Clearly, with the changes occurring as a result of internet access, the role of hard copy collections is going to be changing. Still, for the foreseeable future, books and other hard media will continue to be an important component of idea and information exchange. Table 10 shows the size of the collection in each branch as of May, 2000.

TABLE 10
Size of the Collection in Each Branch As of May, 2000

Branch	# Items of All Types – Books, CD's, Videos, etc.
Arnett	64,792
Charlotte	34,539
Highland	27,920
Lincoln	45,363
Lyell	24,101
Maplewood	48,215
Monroe	39,737
Sully	33,231
Wheatley	35,973
Winton	63,745
Total	417,616

Source: RPL Item Count, 5/11/00

A less traditional measure of how a particular branch provides access to ideas and information is the scope of items in its collection. One of the clear differences among branches is the size and scope of their collections. The head of each branch exercises his or her judgment about both the content and type of media to make available. It is clear to CGR that individual branch usage statistics vary in part because of the decisions about the collections made by the individual branch librarians. These decisions are based partly on what the librarian believes is desired and/or needed in the community served by the branch, and also what types of materials will increase usage of the library. Thus, different branches have specialized collections for different segments of the population.

Despite variations in content and media type, however, material is generally categorized into Juvenile, Young Adult and Adult categories. To illustrate the different approaches taken by the branches, CGR identified the top ten groups of items, regardless of media type (i.e. hardback, paperback, CD, etc.) for several branches. The results, shown in Table 11, show the different emphases placed by branches on providing materials for the three populations.

TABLE 11
Juvenile, Young Adult, and Adult Items as a Percent of Total Collection

(For Selected Branches – May, 2000)

Branch	Total # Items in Collection	Juvenile	% of Total	Young Adult	% of Total	Adult	% of Total
Arnett	64,792	16,882	26%	7,239	11%	30,413	47%
Lincoln	45,363	19,661	43%	3,524	8%	15,664	35%
Sully	33,231	14,757	44%	3,198	10%	12,914	39%
Winton	63,745	20,028	31%	4,863	8%	28,799	45%

Source: RPL Item Count, 5/11/00

Answering Requests for Information

Requests for information (reference requests), which require the time of a librarian to answer, are logged in at each branch. These requests are broken into two categories: requests from persons at the library, and requests for information handled over the telephone. Table 12 shows the trend for both types of requests over time.

TABLE 12
Reference Requests with the Branch System

(Total for All Branches)

Year	Total # Reference Requests In Person	Total # Reference Requests By Telephone
1999	67,978	9,588
1995	39,668	7,405
1990	26,109	6,382
1985	17,541	3,827

Source: RPL Statistics

Programs

One of the specific services that have historically been associated with branch libraries is programs. Programs provide the opportunity for live interaction between a teacher and program participants, or for an audience to participate in a group activity consistent with the role of the library (such as attending a workshop, viewing a movie, etc.) Programs can be either

sponsored by the library, or provided in the library facility by an authorized non-profit organization. Programs are also a way for library staff to target special groups for teaching, toddler and young mother reading programs being one example.

As discussed in Section 3, some of the RPL branches lack the space and/or a large community room to provide large scale programming. Still, across the entire system, programming has been an important and traditional service of the branches.

However, as shown in Table 13, there has been a significant change in programming activity across the branches. Since 1985, the number of programs offered has dropped by over 40%, and the total attendance at programs has dropped by over 60%. The average attendance at programs has dropped from 8.6 persons per program in 1985 to 5.5 persons per program in 1999.

TABLE 13
Attendance at Programs in the Branches

Year	Total # of Programs Offered	Total Attendance at Programs	Attendance/Program
1999	3,701	20,400	5.5
1995	3,587	27,875	7.8
1990	4,182	52,070	12.4
1985	6,408	55,386	8.6

Source: RPL Statistics

C. Who Is Served

So far in Section 3, data has been presented about the physical plant, the costs and usage statistics for the branches. The last (but certainly not the least important) question to be asked in this report is – who is served by the branch system. Or, put another way, who benefits from the costs to the taxpayers for the RPL branch system?

These questions, as could be expected, are not easy to answer. For example, who benefits from the role the library plays in providing a safe haven for community residents? How does one measure the perception of that benefit to individual citizens? To some extent, these general perception questions can be answered through the use of surveys. Both the RPL and the City of

Rochester commissioned separate user surveys within the last five years, and in both surveys residents gave the branch libraries very high marks in terms of value of service and importance to the neighborhoods.

In addition to the difficulty in measuring relatively intangible benefits, many of the tangible benefits of the branch system are shared by citizens throughout the metropolitan community. This is primarily due to the fact that the MCLS system was intentionally designed to make borrowing materials and utilizing library facilities very easy, regardless of location. Thus, city residents use suburban facilities and suburban residents use city facilities whenever they want, and the collections purchased by each facility in the MCLS system are (with few exceptions) available to any MCLS patron at any site in the system.

However, since this report is focused on strategies for the future of the branches specifically located in the City of Rochester and funded through the City operating budget, CGR's approach to the question of who uses and benefits from the RPL branch system centered on measuring the direct impact of the branches on city residents.

For some data, the desired information simply doesn't exist – for example, the libraries do not ask where each person who enters a library lives. So, for example, although 71,998 people walked into the Arnett branch in 1999, no one knows where those people came from. However, CGR has been able to draw reasonable inferences about some major characteristics about the populations who are served, and who are not served, by the individual branches and the branch system as a whole. Due to the scope of this project, CGR only carried out a detailed analyses for the Arnett branch. However, this analysis can serve as a model for study of additional branches in the future.

Where Do Cardholders Live

The MCLS maintains an electronic record of information for each person who holds a valid library card in what is called the Patron file. Library cards are issued through any MCLS member, which includes all RPL branches. CGR extracted information from the

Patron file in June, 2000 and geocoded that information to identify where patrons live. The Patron file includes any patron who has registered with the MCLS since 1983, and is still a cardholder in good standing.

The MCLS file contains approximately 412,000 records. Of those patrons, in round numbers, 404,900 patrons listed addresses in Monroe County, and 98,500 listed addresses in the City of Rochester. Using 1990 census figures, in the city, there were 206,048 city residents ages 6 or more (6 was used for comparative purposes - a library card will be issued to a child enrolled in kindergarten, which could be age 5 or 6). After adjusting the 1990 figures down by 10% to reflect actual 2000 population estimates, this means that approximately 52% of the potential cardholders in the city actually have valid cards. CGR could not readily locate comparable figures for other cities. However, the City of Houston specifically set a goal several years ago to get 100% of its eligible residents to have library cards. Also for comparison purposes, approximately 69% of the eligible people in Monroe County who live outside the city hold library cards.

A more interesting question for individual branch libraries in the city is to what extent do the neighborhood branches actually serve residents in their neighborhoods. Table 14 shows the number of cardholders from each branch and the distance of their current address from the branch. For example, there were 8,507 people with cards that were issued at the Arnett branch. 34% of the Arnett cardholders have an address within ½ mile of Arnett, 70% have an address within 1 mile of Arnett, 90% live within the city, and 10% of Arnett cardholders live outside the city limits.

Some library staff who reviewed these percentages suggested that the number living some distance from Arnett is inflated because the database includes patrons from as far back as 1983, and substantial movement would be expected dating back that far. To verify if that was true, CGR ran the same comparison for new cardholders in 1999 and 2000, and found close to the same ratios. Thus, even year old figures indicate that approximately 2/3 of the people who register for Arnett cards reside more than ½ mile from that branch.

TABLE 14
Number of Cardholders Per Branch and Where They Live

Branch	Number of Cardholders*	% Living Within ½ Mile	% Living Within 1 Mile	% Living in City	% Living Outside City
Arnett	8,507	33.5%	69.8%	89.5%	10.5%
Charlotte	6,857	18%	44%	42%	58%
Highland	4,004	30%	47%	79%	21%
Lincoln	9,911	34%	66%	95%	5%
Lyell	5,109	29%	57%	83%	17%
Maplewood	7,619	27%	59%	79%	21%
Monroe	6,411	38%	59%	80%	20%
Sully	5,253	38%	65%	87%	14%
Wheatley	5,368	45%	66%	96%	4%
Winton	11,354	19%	46%	60%	40%
Rundel	55,818	3%	11%	58%	42%
Total Branches Only	70,393	30%	58%	78%	22%
Total Branches + Rundel	126,211	19%	38%	70%	30%

Source: Patron File 6/11/00

* This is the number of people with cards which were issued from and registered to that Branch.

Table 14 shows that, for the branches, on average, only 30% of the cardholders from that branch live within ½ mile, and only 58% live within 1 mile of the branch that issued their card.

CGR looked at another related question. The Patron database shows that there are about 4,400 people who have an MCLS card who live within ½ mile of the Arnett library. About 2,100 of those people have Arnett cards. Thus, over 50% of the library cardholders who live within ½ mile of Arnett have cards that were not issued by Arnett.

Where Do Library Users Live

As just illustrated, perhaps as many as 50% or more of the people who live within ½ mile of a city branch don't hold cards from that branch. One possible inference from this observation is that a

substantial number of residents who live close to a branch do not necessarily use that branch, or have any special allegiance to that branch. However, knowing whether or not someone has an Arnett card does not actually measure whether or not that person uses Arnett. Therefore, CGR developed another measure, using transaction data from a week in June and a week in July of 2000. A transaction means a patron borrowed an item from a library. One patron can, of course, take multiple items out at one time. However, this was adjusted through a matching process with GIS.

During the two weeks, there were 892 transactions at Arnett, made by 190 individual patrons. Of the 190 patrons, 61 patrons (32% of the total) lived within ½ mile of Arnett, 108 patrons (57% of the total) lived within 1 mile of Arnett, and 137 patrons (72% of the total) lived within the city limits. This meant that 28% of the patrons who used Arnett lived outside the city.

During the same period, there were 63 patrons who lived within ½ mile of Arnett who went to another library in the MCLS to get materials (i.e. make a transaction), and 271 patrons who lived within 1 mile of Arnett who went to some other library than Arnett to make a transaction. Table 15 summarizes these two sets of findings.

TABLE 15
Which Library Do People in the Arnett Library
Neighborhood Use?

# of Patrons Within ½ Mile of Arnett Who Took Materials from Arnett: 61	# of Patrons Within ½ Mile of Arnett Who Took Materials from Another Library: 63
# of Patrons Within 1 Mile of Arnett Who Took Materials from Arnett: 137	# of Patrons Within 1 Mile of Arnett Who Took Materials from Another Library: 271

Source: MCLS Transaction Files 6/15/00—6/20/00, 7/12/00—7/17/00

Characteristics of Library Users

In April 1996, a consultant conducted an extensive survey of library users for the RPL, to determine the satisfaction of library patrons, their use of the branch libraries, the issues of importance to the patrons, and their demographic profile. The survey results were based on a minimum of 250 interviews at each of the branch libraries. CGR's review of the consultant's report is that it contains many useful findings. However, there is reason to question one of the principle statements of the authors of the report, namely that "The library branches are truly neighborhood libraries".

CGR believes there is plenty of evidence to suggest that in fact the branch libraries do not serve significant portions of the communities in which they are located. The two findings from actual patron and transaction records outlined above suggest that significant portions of residents in the community use some library other than their local branch library. CGR also compared the demographic profile of the survey respondents to actual city demographics from the 1990 census, and found a number of obvious discrepancies. Since the survey was based on people who actually entered into the branches, one can conclude that, at least during the week the survey was taken, that people who use the branch libraries are on average more female, substantially better educated, older, and with a higher income level, than is true of the average city resident. This is more evidence that, in fact, there are significant portions of the city population who are not using (and by inference not being directly served by) the branch libraries as they are currently being administered.

D. Summary— Important Trends

CGR believes that this review of the current state of the branches, especially historical trends and current usage data, raises several key points for the RPL to consider.

- ❖ While two standard indicators of usage – circulation and door count - show relative signs of stability, the substantial reduction in program activities and program attendance suggests that both a shift in priorities within the branch system has occurred, and the

general population may have changed in terms of how it values library programming.

- ❖ Two theories were expressed to CGR to explain why programming has changed so dramatically. One theory is that as staff have been cut, there had to be a trade-off between keeping libraries open or running programs. Keeping libraries open was deemed a higher priority. The second theory is that there has been a significant change in demand on staff time to due the introduction of computers with internet access into the individual branches. Both of these theories are supported by data presented in this section.
- ❖ Analysis of cardholder and transaction activity suggests that library users are much more mobile, and much less “loyal” to a local branch library than assumed. This suggests that the role of branches as “community” libraries is changing. The evidence suggests that even patrons who live very close to branches will go to other libraries to obtain ideas and information. If that is true, and if programming has become less important over time, then what roles will the branches play?
- ❖ Both the cardholder analysis and the review of the 1996 library user survey suggest that there are significant numbers of city residents, maybe as much as one-half of all city residents, who have little if any connection to the branch library system. This represents both a significant challenge and a major opportunity to the branch system. In particular, for those branches with higher cost to service ratios (for example, total branch cost divided by circulation, or door count, or program participants), the challenge is to generate more activity in the branch to create a better return on investment. The opportunity rests in the fact that by generating more activity in the branch, the branch will be better able to carry out the RPL mission.

SECTION 4 – Using Cost/Performance Ratios

It is important to consider several dimensions in assessing both the costs associated with the current branch system and the implications for modeling costs in the future. Throughout this report, CGR uses both selected unit cost and total cost indicators to illustrate different ways to understand the branch system. For purposes of this report, CGR has focused on total, or gross costs of the branch system, rather than “net” costs, which would be the total costs minus revenues. This is because revenues have typically been less than 10% of costs, and almost all of the revenues have come from fines and fees, which are incorporated into a general allocation and not segmented out by branch.

A. Calculating True Total Costs

The general public and city policy makers usually focus on the cost of the branch system as shown in the city budget under the “Community Library” section. For example, the FY 1999-2000 budget showed an allocation of \$2,669,900 for the branches. However, this did not represent the true total cost of the branch system. To calculate true total costs, CGR added costs for employee benefits (included in the undistributed expenses section of the budget), cash capital costs (specifically for library materials and equipment), a CGR derived pro-rated central administrative cost, a CGR derived capital investment cost (to account for both cash capital building renovations and capital debt principal) and interest expenses for any debt issued and outstanding. For FY 1999-2000, CGR’s calculated actual Community Library total budgeted cost was \$3,663,815.

Key total cost parameters from 1985 through 1999 are shown in the next table.

TABLE 16
Key Total Cost Indicators for the Community Library System

	FY 1984/85	FY 1989/90	FY 1994/95	FY 1999/00
Community Library Budget	\$1,505,200	\$1,853,500	\$2,021,700	\$2,669,900
Employee Benefits	\$234,500	\$250,000	\$400,000	\$316,700
Equipment & Materials	\$260,000	\$402,000	\$377,000	\$419,500
Pro-Rated Central Administration Cost	\$53,902	\$64,442	\$49,007	\$60,068
Capital Investment and Interest	\$161,764	\$161,764	\$195,792	\$190,826
Total Calculated Cost¹	\$2,215,366	\$2,481,706	\$2,643,499	\$3,656,994
Total City Budget	\$208,507,500	\$240,783,500	\$277,518,600	\$327,390,000
Library as % of Total City	1.06%	1.03%	0.95%	1.12%
Employee Years	61.9	54.9	49.5	52.2
Materials Budget (books, etc.)	N/A	N/A	\$341,100	\$409,800
% of Total for Materials	N/A	N/A	12.9%	11.2%
Employee Budget (Wages, Salaries, Benefits)	\$1,284,500	\$1,499,000	\$1,701,300	\$2,459,900
% of Total for Employees	58%	70%	79%	67%

Source: RPL and City Budget Data

¹Calculated by CGR

The key conclusions to be drawn from Table 16 are:

- ❖ When considering true total costs, the branch libraries have represented just over 1% of the total City budget for the last fifteen years.
- ❖ Employee costs (direct costs plus benefits) as a percentage of the branch system costs have gone up over the last fifteen years although the number of employee years has gone down.

- ❖ Employee costs represent approximately two-thirds of the annual cost of the branch system.
- ❖ The second largest single cost for the branch system is the annual purchase of books and other material for circulation.

These conclusions have clear implications for developing strategies for the system as a whole (which will be presented in Section 6).

B. Cost/Performance Measures for Individual Branches

In addition to developing strategies for the branch system as a whole, the RPL will be faced with the ongoing need to develop strategies for individual branch libraries. Clearly, one of the keys for developing strategies for individual branches will be the ability to relate costs to performance. In Section 3, a number of indicators were presented which could be used as quantifiable measures of performance by individual branches.

Two performance measures that have historically been used to measure efficiency in libraries are “circulation” (the count of items lent out) and “door count” (the number of people who go into the library). A number of other specialized performance measures shown in Section 3 could be used to help manage specific strategies. For example, if the RPL wanted to focus on providing services to Juveniles, the size and type of collection data shown in Tables 10 and 11 would be useful.

For general comparison purposes, however, and as a way to focus on overall strategic issues for the branch system, CGR recommends that the RPL consider focusing on four performance measures. Linking these performance measures with branch costs provides a useful way to identify differences among the branches, and to identify where particular branches may warrant attention by central management. Using four cost to performance measures rather than the two traditional performance measures will give the RPL a much broader perspective on how well individual branches are meeting both the general role and specific service objectives set by the RPL. The four recommended cost/performance ratios are:

Cost per Square Foot

Cost per square foot provides a quick snapshot of the relative ratio of costs to run a facility compared to the size of the facility. Since personnel costs represent around two-thirds of the ongoing operating costs, the cost per square foot ratio is a good indicator of the relationship of staffing to building size. In the current branch system, staffing patterns across the branches are fairly consistent. Thus, small branches would be expected to have higher cost/square foot ratios, which is generally consistent with the pattern shown in Table 17.

TABLE 17
Cost per Square Foot – FY 99/2000
 (Sorted High to Low by Cost/ft²)

Branch	Total Calculated Cost ¹	Size (ft ²) ²	Cost/ft ²
Highland	\$230,354	3,750	\$61.43
Lyell	\$218,669	3,900	\$56.07
Sully	\$275,484	5,348	\$51.51
Maplewood	\$316,101	6,209	\$50.91
Monroe	\$370,687	7,765	\$47.74
Charlotte	\$365,864	7,936	\$46.10
Winton	\$475,069	11,000	\$43.19
Lincoln	\$475,212	11,800	\$40.27
Arnett	\$476,521	12,000	\$39.71
Wheatley	\$448,186	11,306	\$39.64

¹Total Annual Cost Source: CGR Estimate
²Total Building Size Source: City Data

Cost per Circulation

Although looking at circulation count has been a traditional activity indicator, CGR believes a more useful indicator to measure the effectiveness of a branch is the cost per circulation ratio, which is calculated by dividing circulation for the branch by the total cost of running the branch. If getting the library's collection materials into the hands of customers (patrons) is a desirable objective (which it is), then this ratio indicates how much it costs a

particular branch to achieve that objective. The lower the ratio, the more efficient the branch. Thus, branches who have either low overall costs, or who have high circulation counts, will appear to be more efficient. Put another way, the lower the ratio, the better the return on each dollar spent to run the branch.

Table 18 shows that there is a wide variation among branches as measured by this efficiency indicator. For example, for Wheatley, it costs \$11.92 for every item circulated, whereas for Winton, it costs \$2.08 for every item circulated.

TABLE 18
Cost per Circulation – FY 99/2000
(Sorted High to Low by Cost/Circulation)

Branch	Total Calculated Cost ¹	Circulation	Cost/Circulation ²
Wheatley	\$448,186	37,610	\$11.92
Sully	\$275,484	28,014	\$9.83
Lincoln	\$475,212	52,407	\$9.07
Arnett	\$476,521	71,998	\$6.62
Maplewood	\$316,101	66,175	\$4.78
Lyell	\$218,669	54,368	\$4.02
Charlotte	\$365,864	124,519	\$2.94
Monroe	\$370,687	150,089	\$2.47
Highland	\$230,354	104,806	\$2.20
Winton	\$475,069	228,134	\$2.08

¹Source: CGR Estimate
²All Items Loaned Out

Source: RPL Statistics

Cost per Door Count

A third performance indicator is cost per door count. Since door count measures the number of people who come into the library, it is a good measure of how much a particular branch library facility is actually used. A high door count is presumably a desirable objective for a branch library. Otherwise, if people are not using the branch facility, why keep the branch open? A high cost to door count ratio could be driven by either high operating costs or low door count. In either case, a high cost/door count

ratio would suggest that a poor return on dollars spent at that particular branch, which would merit management attention. Cost to door count ratios for the branches are shown in Table 19.

TABLE 19
Cost per Door Count – FY 99/2000
(Sorted High to Low by Cost/Door Count)

Branch	Total Calculated Cost ¹	Door Count	Cost/Door Count ²
Sully	\$275,484	43,856	\$6.28
Lincoln	\$475,212	95,100	\$5.00
Arnett	\$476,521	96,652	\$4.93
Wheatley	\$448,186	92,873	\$4.83
Winton	\$475,069	104,787	\$4.53
Charlotte	\$365,864	95,669	\$3.82
Lyell	\$218,669	66,312	\$3.30
Monroe	\$370,687	123,770	\$2.99
Maplewood	\$316,101	120,663	\$2.62
Highland	\$230,354	102,424	\$2.25

¹Total Annual Cost Source: CGR Estimate
²Entry Number from Door Counter Source: RPL Statistics

Cost per Program Attendee

The fourth performance measure proposed by CGR compares the number of persons served by programs provided through the branch to the cost of running the branch. A lower number would indicate either a low cost of operations or a high number of program attendees, both of which are desirable. As Table 20 shows, there is a wide range in this performance parameter for RPL branches, where it cost over \$490 per program attendee at Lincoln and about \$75 per program attendee at Lyell.

TABLE 20
Cost per Program Attendee – FY 99/2000
 (Sorted High to Low by Cost/ Attendee)

Branch	Total Calculated Cost ¹	Program Attendance	Cost/ Attendee ²
Lincoln	\$475,212	962	\$493.98
Arnett	\$476,521	1,540	\$309.43
Maplewood	\$316,101	1,423	\$222.14
Monroe	\$370,687	1,855	\$199.83
Winton	\$475,069	2,479	\$191.64
Highland	\$230,354	1,543	\$149.29
Wheatley	\$448,186	3,087	\$145.18
Charlotte	\$365,864	2,636	\$138.80
Sully	\$275,484	1,985	\$138.78
Lyell	\$218,669	2,890	\$75.66

¹Total Annual Cost Source: CGR Estimate
²Attendance Source: RPL Statistics

C. Summary – Important Issues

To conclude this section, CGR believes it is important to consider at least the four cost/performance ratios just discussed in order to develop a fair and comprehensive assessment of how well any individual branch is meeting the performance objectives set by RPL management. When comparing all of the branches using these cost/performance ratios, several issues become apparent.

- ❖ Depending on which indicator is selected, the branches rank differently in terms of performance and return on investment. For example, Highland has the worst (highest) cost per square foot ratio, but it has the best (lowest) cost per door count ratio and the second best (lowest) cost per circulation ratio. The important point is that all four indicators should be considered together, to paint a more complete picture of the performance of a particular branch. Thus, although Highland's cost structure is high relative to other branches, the RPL is getting a very good return on investment because Highland is being heavily used.

- ❖ One way for RPL management to use the cost/performance ratios as a tool would be to periodically rank the branches from best to worst for each ratio. Based upon those rankings, management might want to focus on those branches that consistently do not rank in the top half of the best performers. In some cases, a branch may rate in the bottom half for one indicator, but in the top half for one or two other indicators. Management could determine if these swings were caused by circumstances or activities unique to that branch.
- ❖ Given the performance indicators shown above for FY 99/2000, two of the branches, Arnett and Lincoln, fall in the bottom half in three out of the four indicators. It was beyond the scope of this project for CGR to study why this is the case, which is more properly an issue that RPL management should address. The important point is that by using a combination of these four performance indicators, the RPL has a tool for identifying early warning signs for branches that may warrant special attention.

SECTION 5 – A Model For Developing Strategies

In the Request for Proposals for this study, the RPL identified a number of specific questions for the consultant to address in the report. CGR will give its responses to those questions in Section 5. However, it is important to understand the approach used by CGR to develop those responses.

CGR believes that the best way to plan for the future of the branch system, and the individual facilities within the system, is to utilize an iterative process whereby any change question is required to address the issues inherent in each of the nine general roles (functions) of a branch library presented in Section 2 in conjunction with meeting the specific service objectives which need to be set by the RPL for its branches.

The process is relatively simple to explain, but can of course become difficult to implement because of the inherent layers of complexity involved in any major decision that occurs in the public sector. The fact that at least five clearly identifiable layers of decision makers or policy drivers are involved in decisions about the branch system makes the process that more complex

(the obvious layers being RPL staff, the RPL Board, city staff, City elected leaders – the Mayor and the City Council – and neighborhood leaders).

Once the general roles and specific service objectives have been set as the measurement standards by the RPL, any significant proposed change to either an existing branch, or for new and/or relocated branches, should be evaluated based on the impact of such change on both the role(s) identified for that branch, and the service objective(s) for that branch, with the cost implications for various options clearly spelled out so that the RPL and the City will receive the best return for its investment.

Since the RPL has not yet identified the service objectives for the branches, CGR will use some hypothetical service objectives in order to demonstrate how the recommended decision process might work.

*A. Example 1 –
Addition of A
Community Room*

Question – should the city spend \$125,000 adding a community meeting room to an existing branch library?

Proposed decision process:

1. Evaluate the importance of Role P.1. in that library's service area. Since the library presently does not have a community room, presumably it does not currently play an important role in that dimension. How many other community meeting spaces exist within the service area? The number and availability of alternative community meeting spaces can clearly be identified through research (a starting point would be the City's Community Resources map). What, if anything, has changed to indicate that there is an increased demand for a new community meeting space in the service area? If there is sufficient demand for such a space, why not add it to another City facility rather than the library?
2. Is the community meeting room needed to meet objectives of Role P.3.? If public investment is seen as critical for creating an investment anchor, would there be a more cost effective use of the \$125,000 to achieve the same objectives?

3. How would addition of a community meeting room enhance the library’s ability to meet the service objectives set for the branches by the RPL? Is investment in the meeting room the most cost effective way to meet those service objectives? For example, if the RPL were to adopt the thirteen ALA service objectives, only one of those thirteen would appear to require at least consideration of a community meeting room (the “Commons” service objective), and even that objective does not necessarily require a dedicated community meeting room, since that objective could conceivably be met by re-arranging currently existing interior space.

Probable Recommendation. Unless there has been a significant and measurable increase in demand for community meeting space, and/or a clear reason to make a symbolic public investment in the neighborhood through investment in the library, it is likely that the \$125,000 could be better spent by the RPL to improve high priority service objectives in some other way.

B. Example 2 – Which Branch To Reduce Hours

Question – in a budget crunch, at which branch should the RPL reduce service hours?

Comment – this question seems to keep recurring every few years in the annual budget cycles. Historically, RPL staff have focused on identifying where cutting hours would have the least impact in terms of serving core information services needs. Specifically, by ranking each branch by both number of people using the facility (door count) and use of library materials (circulation count), it appears to make sense to reduce staff hours in branches which have lower door and circulation counts relative to staff hours. However, focusing only on the impact on information services needs neglects other key roles that libraries play. In this example, CGR suggests considering the impact of Role S.3. – Provide public resources to help democratize the community.

Proposed decision process:

1. Assume for sake of this example that the two branch libraries to be considered for a reduction in hours of operation (i.e. reduced staff costs) are Sully and Winton.

2. Under the traditional approach to identify which alternative would have the least impact on the community, using 1999 figures, it would be reasonable to reduce hours at Sully because both door count and circulation to staffing and hours open ratios are lower for Sully. As shown in Table 21, for example, cutting one hour of operation from Sully would mean that about 23 people would not be served, whereas cutting an hour of operation from Winton would mean that about 45 people would not be served.

TABLE 21
SERVICE RATIO COMPARISONS: Sully and Winton

Sully door count (1999):	43,856
Sully circulation (1999):	28,014
Sully Hours Open (1999):	1,855
Sully Staff Direct Staff Costs (1999):	\$ 163,000
Winton door count (1999):	104,787
Winton circulation (1999):	228,134
Winton Hours Open (1999):	2,303
Winton Staff Direct Staff Costs (1999):	\$ 242,000

Service comparisons:

A. People served per hour open:	Sully:	23.6
	Winton:	45.5
B. Items Circulated per hour open:	Sully:	15.1
	Winton:	99.1
C. Staff cost per person served:	Sully:	\$ 3.72
	Winton:	\$.43
D. Staff cost per item circulated:	Sully:	\$ 5.82
	Winton:	\$ 1.06

Source: RPL Data

3. The traditional approach does not take into consideration the nine roles that community branch libraries play, however. By considering *Physical* and *Sociological* dimensions, a different perspective emerges. In particular, data that can be used to measure the impact of roles S.2. and S.3. suggests that reducing hours at Winton would

have a smaller impact on a city neighborhood than reducing Sully's hours. As shown in Table 22, Sully clearly serves a higher proportion of both people within its neighborhood (whether defined as a ½ mile radius or a 1 mile radius) than Winton and higher proportion of city residents. Further, it could be argued that the demographic characteristics of the neighborhoods surrounding Sully suggest that the potential need for library services in Sully's service area, at least with regard to meeting Role S.3. is greater than the need in the Winton service area.

TABLE 22
Who Uses The Branches: Sully and Winton

Percent of Total Transactions by Patrons within ½ mile:

Sully:	46%
Winton:	23%

Percent of Total Transactions by Patrons within 1 mile:

Sully:	65%
Winton:	49%

Percent of Total Transactions by Patrons within the City:

Sully:	71%
Winton:	56%

Selected Neighborhood Characteristics (from NBN Sector Statistics):

		<u>Sully</u>	<u>Winton</u>
RACE:	% White	50%	92%
	% Black	41%	6%
	% Other	9%	2%
	% Hispanic Orig.	13%	2%
AGE:	% Under 5	11%	8%
	% 5-19	23%	14%
	% 20-29	19%	19%
	% 30-64	36%	44%
	% 65 +	11%	15%
Female Heads of Households With children under 18		15%	4%

Source: RPL Data and NBN Census Statistics

Possible recommendation – if RPL and city leaders were to conclude that service to city neighborhoods takes a higher priority than absolute numbers of persons served by a branch, (which would be one way for the city to measure the benefits to city residents relative to the costs to city taxpayers), then an argument could be made that funding service hours at Sully has a higher benefit to city residents than funding service hours at Winton. This could lead to the conclusion that hours should be reduced at Winton rather than Sully.

C. Summary

These two examples are meant to illustrate how the change process should incorporate a wider range of variables than has traditionally been the case. At a minimum, change decisions should attempt to identify at least a few specific measures, both quantitative as well as qualitative, of how each role of the branch would or would not be carried out and how the specific service objectives of the branch would be met.

In summary, CGR believes that both cost reduction and future investment decisions should be based on a process that considers three distinct factors:

- ❖ Relevant cost/performance ratios
- ❖ The general roles the branch plays in the community
- ❖ The specific service objectives for that branch

Looking at only one or two of those three factors will likely result in a decision which is less than optimum for the community as a whole.

SECTION 6 – Strategic Planning Issues – Moving Forward

In this Section, CGR will offer our observations and recommendations regarding specific strategic planning issues of interest to the RPL as identified in the Request for Proposals. These observations reflect how CGR would approach developing solutions, based upon the decision model applied throughout this report. Since a key set of variables is unknown at this time, i.e. the RPL has not yet identified a specific set of prioritized service objectives for the branch system, what CGR proposes below should not be viewed as final recommendations, but rather as a

starting point from which RPL can begin the journey of defining the future of the branches.

A. Future Trends in Library Services

In order to identify ideas in the field of library management which might be useful to the RPL, CGR contacted twenty-two different library systems across the country, in addition to performing a literature search. Based upon this review, CGR believes that there are four important trends and/or library management initiatives that the RPL should incorporate into its strategies for the future.

1. Focus Resources on Accomplishing a Few Objectives Well

Charles McClure, a recognized leader and thinker in the field of library science, warned the audience at the new Bausch & Lomb Library Building convocation that libraries “can’t be all things to all people all the time”. In fact, he stated, a major challenge facing libraries is that people want libraries to be good at so many things. There are many, many opportunities in which libraries can be involved. And that, he warned, is the sure path to “death by opportunity”.

How have successful library systems met that challenge? Apparently, by being very focused on setting goals which are achievable, measurable and meaningful, within the context of their communities.

A good starting point for the RPL would be to identify which market basket of specific services should be the focus of the RPL branches. As mentioned previously, the ALA list of thirteen services would be a good starting point for discussion in Rochester. The ALA does not necessarily recommend that all thirteen services should be priorities within the community. In fact, the RPL should a handful of specific services that should become the focus of the branch system, and within that small number of services, selected branches may focus on only two to four areas.

For example, the Milwaukee public library system identified the desire to provide “Business and Career Information” as one of its core services. However, Milwaukee decided that only 3 of its 12

branch libraries would provide that specific service objective, through a partnership with its central library. In a sense, Milwaukee encouraged specialization of its branch system, recognizing that patrons would be willing to make the effort to get to one of those branches to take advantage of that service.

Houston set a very simple, achievable, measurable and meaningful goal for its library system – make sure every resident has a library card. Such a goal would be a challenge for Rochester. But it would also tremendously enhance community recognition of, and most likely use, of the branch library resources.

CGR also found the simplest mission statement for libraries from a Houston library publication. This statement is “The library is a place where people can better themselves through the enrichment gained by reading.” The beauty of this approach is that it can clearly help focus the use of resources on a specific set of tasks.

2. Develop a Strategy for the Impact of the Internet

The internet train has left the station and is coming head on into libraries at 90 miles an hour. Ducking is not an option. The question for the RPL is how to manage the changes which are already starting to be felt. As shown in Section 3, the tremendous growth in usage of internet access in the branches has apparently been at least one major factor in causing a shift away from branch programming. Is this a trend that the RPL wants to continue?

What CGR found suggests that different library systems are handling the internet technology question in different ways. A number of leading systems have consciously made some or all of their branches into key hubs of the municipal internet network. For example, the branch libraries in Charlotte, North Carolina, play an integral part in the whole urban network called “Charlotte’s Web”. Charlotte’s Web clearly creates the opportunity for their branch libraries to become significant community resources for access to electronic information.

On the other hand, libraries do not necessarily have to become internet hubs. In their role as providers of access to ideas and

information, libraries cannot avoid having some internet access capabilities in their buildings. However, there are two service issues which must be explored as the question of internet access is debated. First, what impact does the addition of computers have on library facilities, and second, what role does library staff play in providing internet access service.

In a fixed wall, old style building (which is predominantly the case in Rochester), there is a limit to how much flexibility exists within the library space to accept computer terminals. Once that limit is reached, adding terminals requires making trade-offs for floor space with existing shelving or seating or other space. CGR observed that several of the branches are cramped with the existing computers which have been installed over the last few years. Adding additional terminals is likely to require reducing either common space or collection space. Does the RPL consciously want to make those types of trade-offs?

The impact on staffing is another issue. Should branch staff be expected to provide internet training for patrons? If so, what programmatic shifts will occur? Should the RPL consider an alternative to using existing staff for managing computer and internet training?

Philadelphia developed a program two years ago called "Bits and Bytes" where college and graduate students were hired to set up computer based programs at the branch libraries, including internet training. The second year, high school students were hired as trainers. The requirements for the high school trainers were that they could be average students but had to be willing to work with children and be a role model and get intensive training. The cost to the city was nothing in the first year (it was funded by grants), and in the second year it is paying high school students \$6/hour and giving them a laptop. The program is so popular now that there is a year waiting list to be student trainers, and the library system is now a lead agency for teen training in the city.

Rochester has experimented with a computer training summer program in one branch (Wheatley) through the Kid Tech program. There is no intrinsic reason why basic computer training needs to be provided inside a branch library. For example, Kid Tech was also offered at the North Street Recreation Center. In fact, given

the inherent space limitations at most branches and the larger size and design flexibility of city recreation centers, it may make more sense for computer training resources to be located at recreation centers, and not in the smaller branch libraries.

However, as the city considers how to spend resources to help bridge the “digital divide”, the most cost effective solution may be to incorporate library staff as a key part of the solution, because they have a unique perspective and the training and experience to understand how to use computers and the internet as tools to access ideas and information. This is an example of how inter-departmental linkages could be developed, using library staff to provide expertise to run programs in locations outside of the branch building itself.

There are two other issues linked to internet and communications technologies. The first is the systemic impact of the access to ideas and information previously available only through access to libraries. The second is the role of libraries in answering requests for information. Charles McClure’s convocation talk touched on both of these issues, through what he called the impact of “The Global Network Environment.”

First, McClure suggested that libraries need to recognize that as the general population increasingly uses the internet to gain access to ideas and information, traditional circulation counts are inevitably going to decline. This trend will accelerate once it becomes possible to pull up full textbooks from the web.

Second, McClure suggested that the internet is going to “eliminate brand loyalty”, i.e. people will no longer feel the need to go to a local branch library for information. Telephone or electronic information requests about a specific subject can just as easily be directed to a central information center in Des Moines, Iowa as to a local branch library.

How should these trends be factored into strategic planning for the RPL branches? CGR suggests the following:

- ❖ If demand for traditional library information services shifts to web based demand, and this trend is verified by static or declining circulation and door counts, then the branches could shift some of

their resources back toward providing programming which provides a reason for the community to continue to use the facility.

- ❖ Specialized service content, supported by complementary programming and successful marketing, may be the only way that local branch libraries are going to be able to actively engage local community residents so that they will continue to utilize the facility in sufficient numbers to justify the ongoing expense of operating the branch. In the absence of sufficient door count and other usage indicators, individual branches are going to have an increasingly difficult time competing for limited financial resources.

3. Branch Size and Location

Two specific questions of strategic importance to the RPL: what is an appropriate size for a branch, and where should they be located. There is, unfortunately, no simple answer to either of these questions. It depends on what role(s) the RPL want the branches to play in the community.

As far as CGR could find, there is no generally agreed standard for a size of a branch library. One school of thought is represented by recommendations for the Erie County Public Library system, in which a nationally prominent consultant wrote, “Shoebox’ libraries designed to serve only one neighborhood are a thing of the past...New libraries must be designed to serve regions rather than municipalities.” Generally, CGR found that so called “regional” branch libraries seem to have a size in the range of 10,000 – 12,000 square feet, or larger.

On the other hand, CGR found numerous instances where cities are continuing to build libraries sized from approximately 3,000 to 5,000 square foot. The smaller libraries appear to be specifically intended to serve either: a) neighborhoods, (e.g. a small community branch) or b) as specialized information distribution centers (e.g. the branch in a store concept). Rochester has a very good example of small community library that is cost effective – the Highland branch. As discussed in Section 4, although Highland has a high cost per square foot operating cost, it has the

second lowest cost per item circulated and the lowest cost per person using the library. As another example, a cutting edge library located in a supermarket in Latrobe, PA, which has only 650 sq. ft. of floor space, had a circulation to floor space ratio of 50 items per square foot in 1999. The best equivalent ratio for any Rochester branch was 28 items per square foot. By that measure, the Latrobe mini-library certainly raises questions about what is the “right” size for a branch.

CGR believes that the RPL should not assume that there is a “correct” size for a standard branch. Rather, RPL should be open to, and encourage, sizing based upon the desired function(s) of the branch in question. The most important design factor which RPL should insist on meeting, regardless of the total size of the facility, is to have the interior space be open and flexible, so that the facility can change as program and service priorities change over time.

There are also a number of variables that should be considered regarding both the number and location of branches in the future. One of the key factors to be considered are the goals and objectives that have been set forth in the Rochester 2010 Plan (which will be discussed in more detail later in this section). Another factor is the extent to which the RPL and city leaders want branch libraries in the city to truly provide access to as many city residents as possible. If that becomes an explicit goal, the RPL would then need to re-examine how many libraries it should have in the system in light of the apparent gaps in service shown in Maps 1 and 2 in Section 3. As stated above, if the RPL determines that a top priority of the system should be to provide information access opportunities to the greatest number of city residents as possible, this would support creating a system with more than 10 branches.

Could the system function with less than the current ten branches? Of course. It would be difficult to measure the loss due to an outright closure of a branch, because that would depend to a large extent on what roles in the three dimensions the particular branch played in its local community. Ironically, the loss which might be felt the least would be the loss of access to ideas and information,

since, as has been shown previously, city residents can and do utilize other libraries in the region.

4. Partnerships, Alliances and Joint Facilities

Communities across the country have begun to seriously explore the opportunities which might come from creative partnerships between libraries and other institutions. Several cities have set up joint public and school libraries within schools or other partnerships with both public and private sector organizations. In Rochester, two types of partnerships seem to be of particular interest at the moment: a) opportunities for joint school district and RPL library facilities, and b) joint facilities shared with Recreation centers.

B. Theoretical Benefits of Joint Facilities

When evaluating the potential benefits of joint, or shared facilities, it is important to quantify the benefits to the extent possible. Joint facilities and/or operations can in theory create benefits in three general areas: a) the public relations benefits which result from the appearance that by working together, operations are more cost effective, b) actual direct cost reductions which come about as a result of saving labor by eliminating duplication of effort or by more efficiently utilizing facilities (thus lowering the building operations unit costs and/or capital costs) and/or by obtaining lower prices for purchased goods or services through volume pricing benefits, and c) increased marketing opportunities as a result of synergies from two sets of users converging at one location.

How well are these theoretical benefits actually achieved in real world joint or cooperative operations? CGR's long experience in working with cooperative ventures in the public sector suggests that the public relations (i.e. political) benefits are most likely to be achieved, followed by the benefits from joint marketing. The lowest probability of significant benefits being achieved is in the area of direct costs. Thus, if joint facilities are proposed as a way to reduce overall costs, CGR suggests that the program participants should be very careful to correctly identify potential cost savings.

It is clear that in almost all cases, the capital cost of constructing a joint facility is lower than constructing two separate facilities, especially if the activity schedules for the facilities are complementary. Clearly, building a joint facility that shares one heating system, one sewer system, one parking lot, one common meeting room, a common roof, etc. eliminates duplicate costs. Depending on the building design, ongoing expenses can also be reduced on a unit cost basis, for example, it may be less expensive to heat a joint facility than two separate facilities with the same square footage.

Another savings may come from sharing cleaning and maintenance staff, although these savings are less predictable. A third type of staff savings could occur if the staffs of both operations can provide the services needed in either operation. Most obvious would be the situation where two independent facilities would need staff such as a security guard, where a joint facility might be able to operate with one guard rather than two. Less certain would be whether or not professional level staff who are trained in one operation would be either qualified or interested and capable of providing the services required by the other operation.

It is important to understand this theoretical perspective in order to address the two types of partnerships currently being considered in Rochester.

C. Partnerships with the City School District

Several years ago, the RPL and City Council looked at the potential opportunities for creating shared library operations. On the surface, it is an attractive notion that since school libraries and RPL branch libraries are both theoretically in the same business, (i.e. “a library is a library”) that there should be some operating efficiencies by running joint school district and branch facilities. However, the results of various reviews, which have been re-confirmed by CGR in this study, is that there are significant barriers to creating a single consolidated facility staffed jointly by City School District Staff and RPL professional staff. Some of the barriers identified included the differences in clientele (for example, the branch libraries serve the entire age range of the population), professional training requirements and salary/title differentials.

One question raised during CGR interviews was “isn’t there a substantial duplication between city school district and RPL branch libraries that, if eliminated, could result in cost savings?” CGR attempted to answer this question by measuring the amount of duplication that exists between the collections in school libraries and RPL branches.

Since the City School District is only now in the process of automating their school library catalogs, it was not realistically possible to compare the entire school district and RPL collections. However, CGR was able to compare the collection at School # 12 and the Highland Branch Library, both of which are immediately adjacent to each other. Based on a sample of approximately 800 titles, CGR found that 6% of the titles were duplicated in the school and branch collections. Looking at just Children’s titles, 14% of the titles were found in both collections, and for Young Adult titles, 11% of the titles were found in both collections. CGR’s conclusion from this finding is that there is probably far less duplication between school and RPL branch libraries than is generally believed.

This finding does, however, suggest that rather than thinking of the separate collections as duplicating one another (and hence competing with one another for scarce resources), that the two collections should be considered as complementary. That is, if the resources between the school district and the RPL branches could be shared, that would increase the ability to access ideas and information for both children in school and the general public, who routinely only have access to materials in the public library system. One specific plan that the RPL could endorse would be to develop a working relationship with the city school district to enhance the capability of sharing the collections in both organizations.

D. Joint Recreation/Library Facilities

Another topic which was raised in several interviews was the question of whether to, and how to link branch libraries and recreation centers. The impetus for creating these linkages comes from two perspectives. First, many people feel that branch libraries need to take a more proactive role in meeting the needs of young adults to become more capable of accessing the world of ideas and information. Traditionally, libraries have performed this

role through development of reading and listening skills, and through providing easy access to their collections. Recently, computer and internet technology has taken on an increasingly important role in providing access to ideas and information. Critics of the current approach of many of the branches to their young adult programs could certainly point to the reduction in programming and program attendance at branches over the last decade as an indicator in changed branch priorities.

From the perspective of the branch libraries, as neighborhood demographics have changed, and as societal expectations of acceptable behavior has changed, young adults can become a challenge to manage within the traditional expectations of a library setting. Therefore, increasing library resources are being directed towards reactive management rather than proactive management of this important segment of the population.

A number of those interviewed by CGR suggested that one key piece to the puzzle of how to proactively meet the needs of young adults is to develop more creative linkages between recreation centers and other activity based organizations in the local community with the local branch library. CGR noted with interest that one branch which currently seems to be facing the issue of how to meet the needs of young adults -the Arnett branch- had exactly the same issues 25 years ago, as referenced in a letter dated February, 1975, which addressed the need to fund a “Community-Library Intervention Program” for the then brand new Arnett branch. So, the challenge is certainly not new.

What form those linkages will take needs to be worked out. Certainly, a new set of tools that the libraries could use which is entirely consistent with the information access role of libraries is computers and internet access. As discussed previously, it is not necessary, however, that a substantial number of computers actually be located in the branches. What the branches need to focus on is how to encourage the use of computers and the internet to further the broader mission of the library system, and not necessarily feel the need to simply provide computers and internet access solely in the branches. Again, this presents opportunities for collaboration between the branch libraries and any number of community institutions.

Regarding future development of shared recreation and branch library facilities, these may prove advantageous, in particular for linked or cooperative programming. Whether or not there would be worthwhile direct cost savings would require a detailed evaluation of the specifics of a particular shared facility. CGR's perspective is that there is no apparent compelling reason, at this time, to abandon any of the ten existing branches for the sake of building a new branch in conjunction with a new city facility, such as a new recreation center.

Whether or not to build a new branch facility that is linked with another new or remodeled city facility should depend on whether the RPL and the city are interested and willing to expand direct access to library resources into geographic areas of the city which are not presently served by a branch.

Maps 1 and 2 indicate where new branches might be located where opportunities for linkages might be found. There are several models that the RPL could use as examples of how to create such linkages. Which model to use depends on what specific service objectives are set by the RPL.

If the service objective is primarily to provide to provide the traditional access to ideas and information, a mini branch, similar to the previously mentioned branch in Latrobe, PA, could certainly be proposed for inclusion in development of a new store or other commercial development supported by the city. It may well be possible to package building of a small branch within a commercial development as a part of the economic development incentives and financing provided by the city. Or, perhaps a food chain would sponsor a branch integrated with its facility by marketing the slogan: "We offer food for the body and food for the mind".

If RPL were to set a number of service objectives for a new branch, such as providing access to ideas and information and also providing programming specifically designed to meet the educational needs of the service area community, this might require a larger branch that was staffed differently than a mini branch dedicated only to information access. Clearly, the location, size and design of future branches should be driven by both the

*E. Integrating into
the 2010 Plan*

specific service objectives the general roles the new branch is expected to play within the community.

There are three key components of the 2010 plan that, at this stage of the rollout of the plan, should be important factors in developing strategies for the future of the branch system. The first is the role of the branch libraries in providing educational excellence for the community. The second is the role of branches in providing quality services to the community. The third is the role of the branches in creating and maintaining healthy urban neighborhoods. All three roles have been discussed at various times throughout this report. However, some additional comments would be helpful regarding how the 2010 plan might affect the location of future branch facilities.

One of the cornerstones of the future physical development of the city will be the focus on concentrating public resources in building strong neighborhood cores. These cores are expected to provide the physical and sociological center for neighborhood clusters throughout the city which are referred to as urban villages.

Certainly everyone CGR interviewed who commented on the concept of an urban village recognized that a branch library is a critical component of the village. What is not yet clear is the extent to which the current 10 branches will be able to meet the desired characteristics of the urban village cores, or whether, over time, new branches would be desired as village cores are developed. The city is currently in the process of developing a model that can be used to identify what urban village cores could look like, and what public and private investment patterns should be encouraged to foster growth of the urban villages throughout the city.

CGR encourages the RPL to actively track and participate in discussions about development of the urban village core model, because that may very well have an impact on how and where the city will be willing to invest public funds in new or replacement facilities, including branch facilities. The RPL should also be willing to offer several alternative models that could be incorporated into any urban village core investment decisions. For example, the RPL should consider supporting small idea and information access branches where appropriate, or mid size (3,500

to 7,500 square feet) branches in other situations, where service objectives warrant such facilities.

*F. Operational Issues
– Staffing, Costs and
Funding*

Throughout this report, CGR has presented numerous ideas about changing and improving services and/or facilities in the branch system. However, little has been said about the realities of the current fiscal state of the City of Rochester. It is clear that the RPL needs to consider how cost and funding constraints may affect the strategies that it develops for meeting the needs of the next ten-year. CGR believes that the best course of action for the RPL would be to develop fair, reasonable and fiscally prudent strategies without being unduly cautious about a potential lack of funding. There are three reasons for the RPL to not fear the worst.

First, the historical record shows that elected city leaders have consistently supported the branch system with approximately 1% of the total city budget. This indicates that the city residents, through their elected leaders, recognize the importance that the branch system plays in the quality of city living. Certainly, in any individual year, a short-term budget crisis may arise which necessitates either a slowing of the growth of the RPL budget, or in a severe case, actual cuts from the previous year. However, the long-term perspective suggests that the city has been committed to a continuing investment in the branch system.

Second, periodically additional funding becomes available from unanticipated sources. The recent push by the New York State Regents to have the state increase funding for libraries may provide a significant source of additional funding for the branches. Certainly, additional grants from public and private sources have supplemented the RPL budget, and there is no reason to think that this funding will cease in the future.

Third, the RPL has several options available to cover short-term budget shortfalls. None of these options would be desirable as long-term solutions to a structural budget deficit. However, the system could certainly absorb one-time givebacks without creating a serious long-term impact in the branches.

Given these considerations, CGR believes that the RPL can reasonably assume, for future planning purposes, that it will realistically continue to receive approximately \$3.5 to \$3.6 million,

adjusted forward for inflation, to spend within the branch system. A general breakdown of the historical cost components is shown in the RPL Branch Libraries Cost Data sheet included in Part 2 of this report. This shows that the total amount includes funding for capital improvements, which again indicates that the city has historically committed to maintaining the branch library facilities in addition to funding ongoing operating costs.

If, as a result of suggestions in this report, the RPL chooses to make changes to the current branch system, how would the RPL fund such changes? One option would be to seek additional funding through either public or private sources. CGR cannot reasonably predict how successful RPL would be in obtaining additional funding. The other option could be to re-allocate how the \$3.6 million is being spent, to shift money from being one type of cost to another. A third option would be to free up money within the \$3.6 million cap by identifying cost efficiencies and using the savings to fund new initiatives.

CGR was not engaged to conduct a detailed study of costs or efficiency opportunities for this project. However, our observation of current branch operations suggests that it is unlikely that there are significant cost savings (i.e. in the order of magnitude of tens of thousands of dollars) to be found by efficiency gains.

However, the RPL might wish to study further whether or not there are opportunities to shift money from one type of cost to another. The strategic approach to this process would be to focus on the top two or three areas of expense and identify whether or not changes could or should be made in those areas. As indicated previously, approximately two thirds of the branch budget goes for personnel costs, with the second highest expense category being books and other materials (roughly 10% of the total).

As the RPL develops its service objectives for the future, and links them to programs and facilities, CGR suggests that staffing configurations should be a critical component of RPL's strategic planning. As an exercise, could RPL construct a branch system with 12 branches instead of 10, within the current budget of \$3.6 million? Conceivably the answer is "yes" if the system was built around a different staffing configuration. For example, the current

staffing model assumes that a Librarian III has to be responsible for each branch. However, perhaps a branch system of the future could be designed for a different combination of staff which would result in the same total cost for personnel, but with more positions available to run small satellite branches or provide more programming services. CGR did not run any models like this because it was outside the scope of this project, however, this is clearly a tool that the RPL could use in developing its strategies for the future.

While it is reasonable to build a plan for the future that is based on the City's historical commitment to funding the branch system, CGR cautions that the RPL should develop contingency plans for changes which are quite possible. For example, CGR can envision that if the City begins to focus more attention on return on investment performance indicators, the RPL may find it difficult to continue justifying the current level of City funding if, for example, circulation and/or door count figures drop in the future if predictions about the impact of the internet come true. It is important to re-iterate two points which have been made elsewhere in this report:

- ❖ The RPL needs to be very deliberate about monitoring key performance indicators which could affect historic cost/performance ratios
- ❖ The RPL needs to consider whether or not to re-think priorities regarding the impact of providing programs at and through the branch system. As described in this report, programs may be one of the only key services that the RPL can affect by taking proactive steps on its part. Other changes in society, such as the impact of the internet, are going to be much more difficult for the RPL to manage in a way where the branches will continue to provide value for city residents.

SECTION 7 – Next Steps

How can the RPL utilize this report to begin to plan for the future? CGR suggests that an effective way to proceed would be to map out a process which includes three steps.

Initiate A Strategic Planning Process

This report is intended to provide the framework for the RPL to develop specific strategies for the branch system. CGR has outlined what we believe to be the important variables to be considered, and a methodology for using those variables to develop strategies. The next step is for the RPL to begin the hard work of addressing the many issues raised in this report and crafting a vision of the future at both the Board and staff levels.

Engage the Community In the Process

CGR believes that it is very important that the RPL structure a process which involves city staff, the Mayor, City Council, and key community leaders in the discussion of the core issues identified in this report. Involving the community, insofar as this is practical in the development of specific plans for the future of the branch system, will be a key to the community's acceptance of any changes to the system in the future.

Develop a Focused Marketing Plan

As specific service objectives are developed for individual branches or the branch system as a whole, the RPL should also develop a marketing plan to city residents. Individual plans can and should be tailored to the communities most likely to utilize individual branches. In particular, for branches which currently have lower participation in the system by residents in their service area, marketing to those residents is critical. The marketing plan may also have many components.

For example, perhaps one branch, if not the whole system, could set a goal of getting 100% of the residents within one mile of the branch to have a library card. Possible strategies might include:

- ❖ Obtain a grant to pay for marketing and possibly prizes for new cardholders

- ❖ Have the branch system sponsor an amnesty program to encourage old cardholders to become active library users again
- ❖ Set a goal of having every first grader in the city school district receive a library card and a sticker each time they visit a branch.

If nothing else, it is hoped that this report motivates some readers to imagine the branch library system as being even better than it is today, engaging more citizens of all ages to explore the incredible world of ideas and information. The Rochester branch library system is an amazing resource that is clearly not being fully utilized by the community. It could certainly become an even more important part of our civic life.

PART 2 - APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - CGR SAMPLE BRANCH MANAGEMENT PLAN

Overview

In order to illustrate how this report can be used by the RPL to develop specific strategies and action plans for the branches, CGR has constructed a sample branch management plan which follows. It should be clearly understood that this sample plan is intended to be illustrative only. Because it is a sample, it is also not intended to cover all potential issues in a comprehensive manner. It is an outline of how a plan would be developed.

Disclaimer

While CGR used its best judgment to develop the ideas presented in this sample plan, the plan could only be based on the data and information CGR collected for this report. This meant that CGR in some cases had to make certain assumptions and projections without the benefit of sufficient data or information to ensure that assumptions and projections were valid. CGR did not test its management plan with RPL staff or anyone else in the community, nor did CGR receive either tacit or open approval for any of the ideas, judgments, conclusions or public policy implications of its sample plan. The plan is intended solely to illustrate how the findings, observations and recommendations in this report could be used by the RPL to develop a real plan for the future of the branch system.

Step 1 - Develop Unifying Themes

The starting point for developing an action plan for the branch system is to identify a small number of central themes that will guide development of both strategic and tactical planning initiatives. The themes need to be broad enough to permit creative flexibility, but as simply stated as possible in order to reach the broadest possible market that is targeted by the RPL.

The four themes CGR would select for the branch system for the next five years are:

- ❖ “Link With Your Library.” The RPL should develop a marketing program and set an objective of getting every eligible city resident to have a library card within 2 years. This initiative would be a perfect opportunity to create more direct linkages between the RPL and City Schools so that the two organizations would specifically target the students to get library cards.
- ❖ “Welcome To The WOW of Ideas”. The RPL should continue to have as a primary focus the traditional role of providing access to information, educational and entertainment media. However, it could augment this focus by marketing branch libraries as portals to the world of ideas. Every item in the media collections contains ideas that have been recorded in some manner to permit the ideas to be shared. Every person who has had an awakening either in a library, or as a result of materials obtained from a library, has had some form of a “WOW” experience as a result of exposure to an idea. Libraries should be proclaiming that “WOW” experience as a way to attract people into the branches.
- ❖ “Libraries: More Than Information – Knowledge.” The RPL should position the branches so that they become more than just information centers – they should be viewed as knowledge centers. Librarians are specialists in making data and information useful to customers, and the resources available to any library user far exceed the resources of any individual working alone. However, as access to and acceptance of information which is available on the internet becomes essentially universal, libraries will need to distinguish themselves as providing more than simply information and entertainment. Libraries need to focus on helping library users obtain knowledge, not just information.
- ❖ “Learning and Living – Programs To Improve Your Life.” If predictions about the impact of the internet and e-books come anywhere close to being right, there is the potential for a significant drop-off in patrons coming into the branch libraries

for the purpose of borrowing items from the collection. It will certainly be possible to measure the effects of this shift through a steady deterioration of door count and circulation statistics. The RPL should take a pro-active approach to planning for this possibility by shifting resources into providing programming and services that are specifically designed for the communities surrounding each branch. Thus, programs and collections would become both more specialized among the different branches, and more focused within each branch. The general theme would be to develop programs and collections that would be attractive to the residents in the local communities, to address the needs they face in their lives and to help them improve their lives through learning. Programs intended to support this theme could be as diverse as special programs for new mothers to introduce their children to reading, to marketing the Toy Library, to supporting ethnic literature reading, to teaching employment skills.

Step 2 – Develop Focused Strategies

The RPL needs to develop action plans for the branches that recognize the general roles branch libraries play within the context of the larger community, and to adopt a small number of specific service objectives for the branches. Given that the RPL only has a limited budget, it has to identify and remain focused on spending priorities that are most consistent with its overall mission and unifying themes, and resist diverting resources of time and/or funding to be diverted to lower priority objectives.

For the nine general roles branch libraries play within the community as outlined by CGR in the report, the RPL should affirm that the highest priorities for the branches are:

- ❖ I.1. Provide access to the universal body of ideas and information.
- ❖ I.2. Answer requests for information.
- ❖ I.3. Teach members of the community how to read and otherwise obtain and utilize information.
- ❖ S.2. Take on an integral role as a part of the cluster of services available to the community.

- ❖ S.3. Provide public resources to help democratize the community.

Other general roles, while desirable, should play a secondary role when decisions have to be made about allocating resources.

Focusing on these five general roles would help the RPL make decisions about how to prioritize development objectives. For example, since it would not fit within any of the five priorities listed above, the RPL would not advocate spending capital resources to add community meeting room space to any existing branch, unless that branch was specifically included as an integral cluster of public services in a community, consistent with the City's 2010 plan. Further, the RPL would not specifically advocate spending funds on making any branch a gathering place for any particular segment of the population, unless doing so was part of a coordinated plan to have the branch be part of the integrated cluster of services consistent with the 2010 plan.

If those five general roles were assigned the highest priority, this would imply that future investments would be focused in two areas.

- ❖ *New libraries would be smaller.* Capital funding available for additional infrastructure improvements would be directed toward developing facilities that would serve areas of the city that are not located within the immediate service area of an existing branch library. For example, since a primary focus of any new branch would be to provide access to information and ideas (one of the top five general role priorities), and there would not be any requirement to provide a community room or significant community space (since this is not one of the top five general role priorities), very small (mini or pocket) branches could be developed, such as branches in grocery stores, or mini-branches in urban village nodes. Locating new pocket or mini branches within stores or other active urban sites would leverage the use of public money and permit the sites to be staffed by only one person (since staff from the other operations at the site would be available as emergency safety backups).

- ❖ *Programming would be re-emphasized.* Programming would become more important for the branches, as programming is the key for teaching members of the community how to access ideas and information while providing public resources to help democratize the community (which are two of the top five general role priorities). Given this, the RPL would begin to shift resources and invest any additional incremental funding towards devoting people resources to programming. This could be achieved through the use of additional staff, use of consultants or staff from other areas, or a combination.

The American Library Association (ALA) has identified thirteen specific types of services that libraries can provide to the community. While the best case would be for every branch to be able to provide all thirteen types of services, that is not realistic. The RPL should require each branch to focus on at most four of the ALA service responses, and to direct the branch resources towards those focus areas. The branches would not be required to all select the same four focus areas. In fact, the branches would be encouraged to select most, if not all of their focus areas that are most likely to meet the needs of their primary service area (the neighborhood which is within a half mile radius of the branch). For those focus areas selected by more than one branch, branch administration staff, and overall RPL management, should develop strategies to create synergies among those branches to make the most efficient use of resources and leverage knowledge and experience between and among library staff in order to provide the best service.

Step 3 – Allocate Resources Based on the Strategies

Any plan which hopes to have a realistic chance of succeeding needs to estimate what resources are likely going to be available to carry out the plan. The core resource for the branches is funding. Funds are used to purchase personnel, items and services that can be divided into four general categories: staff costs, ongoing facilities and operations costs, lending resources costs (for purchasing books, tapes, etc), and capital costs for improving facilities.

In the absence of severe fiscal constraints or a significant shift in priorities and if historical patterns of funding support from the city continue into the future, the RPL can reasonably expect that it will receive approximately \$3.6 million (plus inflation) in support from the city budget for the branch system.

In 1999, the calculated costs of \$3.656 million for the branch system were split among the four general categories as follows:

❖ Staff costs:	67%
❖ Ongoing facilities and operations costs:	17%
❖ Lending resources costs:	11%
❖ Capital costs for facilities:	<u>5%</u>
	100%

Staffing Changes

In order to put a greater priority on developing programs for the branches, and to be able to provide staff for additional pocket branches as they are developed, the RPL needs to identify ways to increase the amount of staff time available within the system. Some time could be freed up for existing staff by making changes such as developing a different system for handling telephone information requests. The RPL could also request additional staff. If additional incremental funding is not provided for more staff, the RPL might consider shifting resources to accomplish the same objectives. Two possible ways to find resources to shift would be:

- ❖ Reconfigure the staffing of branches so that the four regional branches (Arnett, Lincoln, Maplewood and Winton) are headed by higher level staff than those at smaller branches. One way to create this distinction would be to create a new higher level title in the Librarian series that would acknowledge the additional responsibilities inherent in the position. The details of how to define the positions and deploy the staff would need to be worked out. However, the key concept would be to utilize the skill and experience of the regional branch heads to take on a larger management role over a cluster of 2-3 branch libraries, including

their regional core branch. The regional branch heads' enhanced responsibilities would include making overall collection decisions for the branches in their cluster and developing and coordinating programming that is common to multiple branches. In order to free up time for the regional branch heads to provide more direction and programming, however, their day-to-day administrative duties would need to be reduced. It may be that a reconfiguration of professional, administrative and support level staff could create staff efficiencies which would have the effect of freeing up librarians' time that could be re-allocated towards programming.

- ❖ Dedicate incremental reductions in the purchase of lending resources toward staffing.

Collection Changes

The RPL should review and modify its current strategies for purchasing hard copy materials as lending resources. E-book and universal internet access are likely to reduce the traditional demand for hard copy materials. The RPL should carefully monitor circulation usage and patterns, as these measures would provide an early indication of such a shift beginning to occur. As this happens, the RPL will need to purchase less hard copy material (although overall costs may not be reduced at the same rate as the reduction in items purchased because the costs of items purchased appears likely to be affected by sharply rising prices).

The RPL should also explore using customer preference tracking technology to more precisely measure demand for hard copy materials, build up pro-active customer preference marketing, and reduce the purchase of material that is not sufficiently utilized within the RPL and Monroe County Library System (MCLS). Currently, the head librarian at each branch is responsible for making decisions about what items and titles to add to the collection in that branch. This item and title selection process could be more highly automated, and purchases could be more targeted by more effective use of technology.

Another potential change is being brought about by automation of the MCLS book reservation process. As patrons increasingly take

advantage of the ability to order books online, there will be less demand for branches to have books available on site. In fact, this trend suggests that the library system as a whole may be moving towards the model of a large centralized warehouse for book storage and retrieval, with books being shipped to many small distribution nodes (i.e. mini-branches) for pick up and return by patrons. If this model becomes prevalent in the future, the requirement for large brick and mortar investments in branch libraries will decrease, unless programming requirements fill the spaces previously used to store collection materials.

The RPL could also potentially reduce the size of its branch specific collections, or at a minimum reduce the need to grow the collections, by establishing a cooperative and collaborative arrangement with the City School District (CSD), whereby the collections of the two systems could be jointly accessed. CGR found that there is not a large overlap between the two collections. Thus, if the CSD collection could be used by RPL patrons, they would have the use of a much broader selection of materials.

Infrastructure Changes

The RPL should request that any significant upgrades to the branch system infrastructure, over and above the amount invested in the current structures to keep them up to date, should be directed towards creating more branch outlets, rather than being made at existing sites. The new facilities would be mini or pocket branches, designed for the primary purpose of increasing access to the ideas and information available through MCLS to as many city residents as possible. Innovative linkages such as library outlets within large super markets, or linked with coffee shops or other high volume urban village core centers would be encouraged. Innovative financing arrangements might also be possible through either sponsorship with a company, or through use of public development incentives that incorporate public spaces in private developments.

Mini-branches would not require large capital investments, and would be designed to have high circulation and door count to cost ratios and low cost per square foot ratios. The mini-branch would have several internet access nodes, several MCLS research and order point nodes, an easy access book pick up and drop off point, and possibly a small reading area with a small circulating

collection. These mini-branches would be highly effective primarily because the MCLS is designed to efficiently move materials around within the system, so that any patron at any branch can have almost universal access to any item from anywhere within the system.

The first mini-branches should be targeted for areas of the city that are currently underserved in terms of immediate access to branch locations. The maps of current location service areas show where the current gaps exist which would be the ideal locations for mini-branches. The second priority would be to plan mini-branches into urban village core public investment decisions.

Marketing Initiatives

The RPL should also redirect resources toward a much stronger marketing effort for the branch system. Specific marketing campaigns should be targeted to achieve specific objectives that are clearly in the public interest, such as meeting the goal of having 100% of the eligible population obtain library cards, or having 100% of the residents within a branch service area actually visit the branch during a six month time period. These type of public interest objectives would be attractive opportunities for corporate or foundation funding. Marketing objectives should be set for both the RPL branches as a system (e.g. getting everyone throughout the city to have a library card) and for each individual branch (e.g. marketing their specific core specialty areas – see Step 4 below).

Step 4 – Develop Specific Strategies for Each Branch

Specific strategies for each of the existing branches need to take current resource limitations and expectations into account as well as changes which would be consistent with the four themes and the general and specific strategies identified within the overall plan. In this context, action plans for each of the current branches would be:

Arnett

Arnett would continue to be considered a regional library, i.e. it would be headed by a regional branch librarian, who would also assume overall collection and programming responsibilities for Lyell and Wheatley. Arnett has, for at least the past twenty-five years, played a key role in both physical and sociological dimensions in its neighborhood. This is not likely to change for the foreseeable future. Perhaps as a result of the various demands from the neighborhood that often pull branch resources in

competing directions, the branch ranked poorly in three of the four primary cost/performance ratios.

If the city were to start over with a clean slate, it is not likely that the current site would meet the selection criteria being discussed in the 2010 plan at this time. However, since the structure is fundamentally sound and the library is well established in its current location, there is no reason to expect that the library would be moved in the foreseeable future. Fortunately, the inside is essentially a large open area, thus there are opportunities to change the interior of the structure to accommodate programming changes without a significant capital investment.

Within that general context, Arnett should focus its programming initiatives, and its specific service objectives, in the following core ALA services: Cultural Awareness, Formal Learning Support, Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning. Arnett has the physical space to provide programming consistent with these service objectives, as well as space for adding additional internet access stations, which would be consistent with the resources needed for several of these service objectives.

Charlotte

Although the Charlotte service area includes both Greece and Irondequoit, the history of the branch indicates it plays important roles in the physical and sociological dimensions of its neighborhood. Since a significant capital investment in the building was made in the last five years, the branch would probably not move to a new location in the foreseeable future. However, if the city were to start over with a clean slate, it is not likely that the current site would meet the selection criteria being discussed in the 2010 plan at this time. Further, the physical structure of the branch is somewhat limiting in terms of both floor space and design flexibility.

Given the population characteristics within Charlotte's service area, the library could choose to focus on some service objectives that could be targeted towards special interests of the larger Rochester community. Therefore, Charlotte should focus on the following ALA services: Community Referral, Current Topics and Titles, General Information, and Local History and Genealogy. The RPL should not make a major investment to make Charlotte a key internet access point.

Highland

Highland is one of the new branches. It is too big to be termed a mini-branch, but it is too small to provide the full range of services and programming available in a larger building. However, Highland has very good cost/performance ratios because of its high circulation and door count figures. Because Highland is currently functioning well, there is no compelling reason to make significant upgrades to the facility – the RPL should spend its infrastructure improvement funds at other sites. The 2010 plan would probably not identify the site as an urban village core, however, the branch does exist within a service/recreation node, and is thus consistent with the 2010 plan objectives.

Highland is too small to attempt to provide specialized services that would draw patrons from the greater Rochester area. However, Highland could be a programming center – not for bringing programs into its site, but for expanding programming into off-site locations. Thus, Highland could focus on the following ALA services: Current Topics and Titles, Formal Learning Support, Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning. Highland is too small to devote significant space to computer terminals, thus it should not be considered a key internet access point.

Lincoln

Lincoln is the newest branch, one of the largest, and has a unique specialty collection – the Toy Library. Lincoln has not yet developed a historical connection within its neighborhood like most of the other branches. The population in the Lincoln service area is also perhaps the most transient of any of the branches. These characteristics are undoubtedly a major reason Lincoln ranked poorly in three of the four cost/performance ratios. The City's capital investment assures that Lincoln will be at its current location for many years. The location of the Lincoln branch appears consistent with the general siting objectives of the 2010 plan.

Lincoln is also a designated regional branch. Thus, Lincoln would be headed by a regional branch librarian, who would also assume overall collection and programming responsibilities for Sully and any new mini-libraries in that sector of the city. Given the wide range of needs for the population in its service area, Lincoln could focus on a number of service areas. However, four ALA services

that should be considered are: Basic Literacy, Cultural Awareness, General Information and Lifelong Learning. Lincoln is a location where it makes sense to provide as much access to internet terminals as possible, and the building is flexible enough to handle them. However, there may be a need to trade off staff time that can be devoted to internet access programming and the Toy Library staffing requirements.

Lyell

Lyell is a small branch that ranks very well in cost/performance ratios. Lyell does well in providing a range of services to a wide population spectrum. Lyell is also one of the newer branches. However, if the city were to start over with a clean slate, it is not likely that the current site would meet the selection criteria being discussed in the 2010 plan at this time. For this reason, the RPL should not make major capital investments in upgrading the facility. In particular, although there has been an expressed desire to add a community room onto the Lyell branch, this would not fit into the five highest priorities for the general role of branches, and thus RPL should use those resources differently.

Lyell, like Highland, could become a programming center for off-site as well as on-site programs. The extremely diverse population in the Lyell service area suggests that the programming at Lyell should focus on the following ALA services: Cultural Awareness, General Information, Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning. Lyell is too small to be able to house very many internet access terminals, thus, it should not be a major access node.

Maplewood

The Maplewood branch is a study in contrasts. It had the second highest door count in 1999, but a comparatively low circulation count, and the second lowest program attendance. These characteristics reflect its location (it is near a number of schools, including Aquinas) and the population characteristics in its service area. Maplewood's current location appears to meet most of the 2010 location selection criteria, which suggests that there does not appear to be any reason to expect that the Maplewood branch would be moved in the next 10 – 20 years.

Although the branch is below average in size, it appears functional. As a regional branch, it would be headed by a regional branch librarian, who would also have overall collection and programming responsibilities for Charlotte. The inside is divided into two

general areas that are flexible enough to meet changing needs. The dual wing configuration presents an interesting opportunity for the RPL to experiment with services at Maplewood in a way that would be more difficult at other branches. For example, perhaps Maplewood should devote one wing to becoming an on-line information center specially designed for students. To accomplish this, Maplewood would need to reduce its collection in some other way. That would be in keeping with the notion that, to the extent possible, individual branches should develop their own focus and identity.

This strategy suggests Maplewood should focus on the following ALA services: Formal Learning Support, General Information, Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning. Programming initiatives would support these specific areas. If Maplewood were to become an on-line information center, the RPL would invest in upgraded internet capabilities and equipment in Maplewood, and give staff the training and management support to provide that service.

Monroe

The Monroe library has been located in the same structure since 1932. Although there are a number of reasons for wanting to change the location of the library (lack of parking, inflexible site options and difficult structural constraints), the site would still likely fit within the general parameters of an urban village core in that sector of the city. Thus, there is no compelling reason to think that the library will be moved in the foreseeable future. The building at Monroe presents some unique challenges and opportunities for the RPL. Having the collection and functions split between two stories creates additional staffing requirements, however, it also affords the opportunity to hold diverse programs within the building without creating a conflict between various user groups.

As long as Monroe is not particularly accessible by car (due to parking constraints), programming should include a mix of both on-site and off-site options. The four ALA services that could be targeted for Monroe would be: Business and Career, Current Topics and Titles, General Information and Lifelong Learning. Although the building has the space to install additional internet capacity, Monroe's space and staffing specialties would be better

utilized by not having Monroe become a major internet access center.

Sully

The Sully library is the third smallest library building, but has the lowest circulation and door count of any branch. As Lyell and Highland branches show, a small facility should not, in and of itself, limit circulation and door count. Thus, it appears that Sully could benefit the most of any branch from a targeted marketing strategy aimed at the residents in its service area. The Sully building is very basic but functional. There is limited capacity to add internet stations, thus Sully should not become a primary internet access center. Sully also does not have a dedicated community room. However, with the planned construction of a new recreation center across the park from Sully, assuming the recreation center is designed with an integrated community room, there would be no reason to provide a similar space at Sully. If the city were to start over with a clean slate, it is not clear whether the current site would meet the selection criteria being discussed in the 2010 plan at this time. However, since the city is making an investment in the new recreation center in the neighborhood, and since there is a large elementary school across the park, these three facilities create a mini recreation/cultural node that is consistent with 2010 investment decision planning.

Sully could devote all of its resources to meeting the needs of the population in its service area. However, it would also benefit the branch to become a draw for patrons from outside the immediate area. Sully is easy to reach, is on a main bus line, and has plenty of space for parking (or expansion for parking). This makes it an ideal site to for providing services to regional patrons. Thus, Sully would want a mix of ALA services such as Current Topics and Titles and Consumer Information (marketed to a broader mix of patrons) and Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning (targeted to its service area).

Wheatley

The Wheatley library's strength is in programming. Although it has the second lowest circulation count, it has the highest program attendance. Wheatley also has the most attractive and functional community room in the 10 branch system, which makes it an ideal programming center. If the city were to start over with a clean slate, it is not clear whether the current site would meet the

selection criteria being discussed in the 2010 plan at this time. The site is not near an urban village node, nor is it near any recreational or cultural nodes. However, because the city has made substantial investments in the building over the last 30 years, the facility is likely to remain in its current location for the foreseeable future.

Wheatley should enhance its focus on programming. The recent Kid-Tech program is consistent with that push. As more of the space and staff time become devoted to specialized programming, other areas of the library will need to be shifted and/or reduced. The branch could build on the Kid-Tech marketing by becoming another major branch internet node, along with Maplewood, which would focus on providing internet access programming to the greater Rochester community. Specific ALA services which would complement this theme would be: Formal Learning Support, General Information, Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning. Programming initiatives would be designed to support these specific areas.

Winton

The Winton branch serves as a regional library, and its usage numbers bear that out. Winton has the fourth highest door count, but has a circulation that is approximately 50% higher than the next highest branch. Winton is clearly utilized by patrons from the eastern Rochester suburbs as well as city residents. The location of the branch appears to be consistent with 2010 location criteria, as it is part of a commercial strip within a clear urban village node. The specific site has limitations of parking and easy access into the building, which suggests that although the building will continue to be utilized for the foreseeable future, in the long run, the RPL may wish to plan for locating the branch to a different site within the urban village core.

Since Winton is a regional library, it should be under the direction of a regional branch librarian, who would also have collection and programming responsibilities for Highland and Monroe. Winton should focus on its role as a high circulation, high use library, and de-emphasize programming as a core function. Programming initiatives could instead be carried out through the Monroe and Highland branches. Winton's ALA service objectives would be: Cultural Awareness, Current Topics and Titles, General Information, and Lifelong Learning. Space requirements for the

collection to meet these service objectives limit the capacity for additional internet terminals, so Winton would not become a major internet access center within the branch system.

APPENDIX B – BACKGROUND INFORMATION RESOURCES

Background Information:

CGR made extensive use of budget data, monthly branch activity reports, and other library patron and circulation records maintained by the RPL and the Rochester Budget Bureau from 1985 through 1999 to create a comprehensive factual description of costs and activities in the branches over time. Despite some holes and inconsistencies in the data, CGR believes that this inventory of facts provides a solid foundation on which to build strategies for the future.

Interviews and Survey Data:

CGR conducted extensive interviews with a wide range of elected and appointed officials and department staff in the RPL system, the city administration and the city school district. These interviews, along with survey data collected by separate studies in 1996 and 1997 of both library users and City of Rochester residents, provided CGR with insights on a comprehensive range of issues, concerns and ideas about the role of branches in community life.

Benchmarking Data:

CGR devoted considerable time to researching the role branch libraries play in other major cities. While CGR found it useful to compare the physical attributes of various branch systems in terms of branch system design and cost, it is very difficult to make valid “apples to apples” cost comparisons. Each community has its own way of factoring in costs and counting performance variables to meet its unique governance structure and information needs. Thus, CGR did not place a heavy emphasis on cross community benchmarking of “performance” or “productivity” measures.

Rather, CGR concluded that the primary value of looking at library programs in other communities is to identify activities and programs that can provide ideas for changing, improving and growing the Rochester branch system.

Persons Interviewed by CGR

RPL Staff/ RPL Directors

Jackie Amos
 Jocelyn Basley
 Terry Bennett
 Tom Blanda
 Lydia Boddie-Neal
 Lynn Borrie
 Leatrice Brantley
 David Creek
 Rev. Errol Hunt
 Robert Hursh
 Carole Joyce
 Betty Lawrence
 Kevin Loughran
 Maria Lucarelli
 Jean McClure
 Freda Miller
 Richard Panz
 Kate Parsons
 Mary Clare Scheg
 Carolyn Schuler
 Paula Smith
 Marty Steinhauser
 Jean Verno
 Maureen Whalen
 Mary Jane Wright

City Staff/City Council

Thomas Argust
 Vickie Bell
 Nancy Burton
 Vincent Carfagna
 Marlene Davidson
 William Faucette Jr.
 Lois Giess
 Richard Hannon
 Marisol Lopez
 Wade Norwood
 Loretta Scott
 Larry Stid
 William Sullivan
 Jacquie Whitfield

City School District

Donna Koperski
 Linda Sundlof

Other Library Systems Interviewed or Contacted

Atlanta, GA
Austin, TX
Binghamton, NY
Boston, MS
Brooklyn, NY
Buffalo, NY
Charlotte, NC
Columbus, OH
Denver, CO
Hartford, CT
Houston, TX
Latrobe, PA
Leroy, NY
Los Angeles, CA
Marion County, Indianapolis, IN
Memphis, TN
Milwaukee, WI
Multnomah County, OR
Onondaga County/Syracuse, NY
Philadelphia, PA
Portland, OR
Queens, NY
St. Louis, MO
Wake County, NC
Wichita, KA

APPENDIX C – INDIVIDUAL BRANCH INFORMATION