

Russell Library: Planning for the Future

Frequently Asked Questions

updated 10/14/2025

Is there going to be a new library? Are you moving?

[Current plans](#) call for a major expansion and renovation at the library's current site at 123 Broad Street. ***The original ("church") portion of the library and the Hubbard Room would remain in place.*** All other portions of the library would be repurposed/replaced, and the footprint of the library would be expanded.

The Russell Library/City Hall Feasibility Study Committee studied several other sites around town, but after weighing pros and cons and listening to community input, the Committee decided it would be best to keep the library at its current downtown site.

Over the past several years, the Russell Library has been evaluating our facilities and community needs. We've conducted multiple library-focused surveys and public workshops, and we've also been an active participant in town-wide planning initiatives. Thousands of Middletown residents have given their input about the future of our community via

- the library's five-year [Strategic Plan](#) (2020),
- a library [Vision Committee Report](#) (2021),
- the City of Middletown's [Plan of Conservation and Development 2020-2030](#),
- the City of Middletown's [Return to the Riverbend Master Plan](#) (2022), and
- a robust [library community engagement process](#) (2024).

In addition to incorporating input from our residents, we have also worked with professional architects and consultants, who have provided

- Exterior Facilities and Conditions Assessment of Russell Library (TLB Architects, 2013)
- [Comprehensive Facilities and Engineering Assessment and Space Planning Recommendations for Russell Library](#) (HMA2 Architects, 2021)
- [Phase I Feasibility Study for Russell Library and City Hall](#) (HMA2 Architects, 2023)
- Phase II Feasibility Study [Concept Images](#) (Silver Petrucelli & Associates Architects, 2025).
- [Economic Impact Study for Russell Library and City Hall](#) (Goman + York, 2025)

What's wrong with the current building?

Aging/failing infrastructure: The last time the library saw any major construction was in 1983, nearly half a century ago. Since then, millions of visitors have come through our doors, resulting in significant wear and tear on the building. Today, major critical systems such as heating, ventilation and air conditioning, roof sections, plumbing, and the elevator are at, or way past, end-of-life, so they are very costly and complicated to maintain.

It's often difficult to find replacement parts for these old systems; in fact, we've sometimes had to resort to searching for parts on eBay because of our antiquated infrastructure. We've been hit with multiple chiller and boiler failures in recent years, resulting in library closures that put our ability to serve as a community cooling and warming center at risk. Our 1980s cooling tower is held together with rusted vise grips and needs constant maintenance and monitoring in order to mitigate the risk of Legionnaire's disease.

Public restroom floors have rotted out due to aging plumbing leaking inside walls. A catastrophic flat-roof leak, which devastated two full floors of the library in November 2022, also necessitated significant asbestos abatement. A drainage problem caused a black mold infestation in one portion of the library, resulting in a costly cleanup. Heavy, toaster-sized chunks of historic 150-year-old wood trim have rotted and periodically fall 20+ feet to the ground, posing a safety risk and allowing squirrels to infiltrate the library's attic.

Short-term library repairs to keep the library safe and habitable are currently estimated at around \$5 million – and that's assuming no major systems fail catastrophically in the near future.

Accessibility is limited: Our fiction and non-fiction book stacks, which were installed in the 1950s and 1970s, are not ADA-compliant: they are not wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs or other types of mobility devices, and there isn't room at the end of each aisle to turn around. This means that many of our residents cannot browse tens of thousands of books in our stacks. In addition, several sections of hallways, including the hallway to the Hubbard Room (our main community gathering space) is not fully ADA-accessible.

- An expanded/rebuilt Russell Library would be designed with accessibility to *all* users as a top priority. All stack aisles and hallways would be wide enough to accommodate every user.

Inadequate space: The Connecticut State Library estimates that Middletown's public library should comprise approximately 63,000 square feet to serve our current and projected future populations. Our current building is 45,000 square feet, about ¼ of which is non-assignable space such as hallways, ramps,

stairwells, and dead ends – most of which are the result of the library being added onto over the decades. We have run out of space in the Children's Room: in order to add badly-needed tables and chairs for children and caregivers, we would have to throw away hundreds of books just to make room.

- Middletown needs flexible spaces for community events, study and work activities, technology access, and creative pursuits.

Not built to be a library: The current facility – a hodgepodge of repurposed buildings – was not originally designed to function as a library. The vast majority of the Russell Library is a 'retrofit': part of the library is housed in an 1834 church, and another part in a 1960s bank. Because the library consists of multiple cobbled-together structures, there are now, for instance, a total of 46 roof surfaces, with 5 different roofing types and 4 different flashing types. This has led to multiple costly leaks over the decades, not to mention a great deal of time, energy and money spent to try and keep these roofs watertight. In general, the nature of our facility renders it inefficient, costly, and difficult to heat, cool, and keep secure.

The most recent (1983) construction was built to get us through to the Year 2000, at which point plans were supposed to be made for a more permanent solution. We are now 25 years 'overdue' on that plan.

- A modern, efficient library facility will be built to 21st-century specifications and safety codes and could mitigate annual operating, maintenance and security costs.

What about parking?

While there are nearly 200 parking spaces within a block of the library, young families, seniors, patrons with disabilities, and others have expressed concern with ease, affordability and safety of library parking.

What would happen to library services during construction?

Because of the nature of the current library facility, we would not be able to occupy it during construction. This means that library operations would have to move off-site for up to 2 years while the renovation/expansion takes place.

How much would this project cost?

The total project cost has been professionally estimated at \$58.6 million. Funding sources may include:

- Connecticut State Library construction grant
- State grants
- Congressionally directed federal funds

- Local bond referendum
- Private fundraising
- Foundation and institutional grants
- Contribution of 139 Broad Street property by the Russell Library Company

How can I get involved and stay informed?

- Learn more at <https://russelllibrary.org/future/>.
- Join the [Friends of Russell Library](#).
- Sign up for our [newsletter](#) to stay updated.
- Contact the Library Board via <https://russelllibrary.org/library-board/>
- Want to support the library financially? Donate here:
<https://russelllibrary.org/giving/>