



To: Donita Ward – Library Director, Wells Branch Community Library

From: Eric P. Lashley – Executive Director, PLAN

Re: Assessment of the Wells Branch Community Library

Date: March 10, 2022

---

I visited the Wells Branch Community Library on March 9, 2022 and used a survey to assess the conditions of the library. The following are my observations from that day.

- The library was built in 2003 and has a limestone exterior. The library is divided into the library and community rooms. The library is in a residential neighborhood.
- The landscaping is well done and there is plenty of outdoor seating options and activity areas. The library is fortunate to have this space to use during the pandemic.
- The parking lot has adequate spaces.
- The library was easy to find. My first impressions with the landscaping and outdoor spaces was that the library was a welcoming place. The library had a very nice sculpture at the front of the building.
- There was an exterior bookdrop in the parking lot. I did overhear a conversation about the exterior bookdrop while visiting the library. A mother came into the library and said she had returned books in the bookdrop. The staff member told her the books wouldn't be checked in until the next morning. The mother wanted to check out more books that morning, but there seem to be a limit and he could not checkout until the items on her record were cleared. The staff member had to go out and empty the bookdrop to get the books off the mother's record. This was good customer service but having to go out and check exterior bookdrop for the patron caused the transaction to take about four times longer than needed.
- Due to being in a residential neighborhood, the library is in a pedestrian friendly location. There is plenty of shade on some sides of the library.
- Hours of operation: I was so pleased to see the library is open 7 days a week. My biggest complaint for many libraries is the lack of hours of operation.
- First impressions of the interior – very clean and welcoming. here seems to be a pinch point at the door and the welcome desk. I know the old circulation desk was removed and replaced with the welcome desk. There isn't a lobby or vestibule so there isn't a gradual entrance into the building. I don't know if during peak times, there is a traffic jam at the entrance.

- The interior signage is minimal, no paper signs hanging everywhere. However, it was difficult finding the restroom when I first entered.
- I only found one display case near the front door.
- There was a small information kiosk near the front door and a bulletin board on the outside of the building.
- Restrooms – clean. I would recommend providing free children’s and adult diapers, and feminine hygiene products in the restrooms.
- Library had digital flatscreen information displays
- Welcome desk – the location of the welcome desk and the shape of the building do not allow for the staff to see the entire floor.
- Service desks – there are three service desks manned to provide security and assistance to patrons.
- ADA Compliance – yes
- Children’s Room – yes – glass walls separate the main library. The story time and quiet reading area were blocked off due to COVID. Family restroom. Recommend providing free diapers.
- Noise levels – there is a weird dynamic in which sound travels in the main area. The library has tried many sound dampening techniques.
- Food and Drink – not allowed at this time due to the mask mandate.
- Teen area – there is a teen area in the back of the library. I would recommend installing a glass wall and video gaming equipment to allow teens to be separate from other users and make noise that won’t disturb other patrons. I would also recommend the Teen Advisory Board help decorate the space. A mural may be used to differentiate the space is for teens.



- Public Computers – adequate number. I have found talking to several public librarians that public computer use has declined dramatically due to the pandemic and many are considering reducing the number of public access stations and repurposing the floor space. I would monitor the statistics and once the pandemic has subsided and truer numbers can be obtained decide how many public computers are needed. Reducing the number of computers can be a cost savings for many libraries.
- Library Director's Office – nice size with space to meet with staff and patrons.
- Conference/Meeting rooms – the library has nice meeting facilities. It is clear the library was designed to meet the community's need for meeting space.
- Staff work area – The staff work area is small. According to the staff, normally no more than three staff members are working in the space at once. No separate technical service area. No full-time cataloger. Each librarian catalogs their own materials. As the library staffing grows, I would recommend having a separate cataloging/tech services librarian and a dedicated space for all new materials being cataloged. As the library gets back to normal and there is more in-person programming, its difficult to provide good programming as well as all the tasks associated with cataloging and processing materials,
- Storage – never enough storage.
- Breakroom – the library has a nice breakroom with a staff restroom and lockers.
- Study/Quiet rooms – yes but were closed due to COVID.
- History Room – no (nothing wrong with this)
- Trash cans and recycling receptacles – yes, nice to see the recycling receptacles
- Lightbulbs – lots of ballast out and flicker lights
- Furnishings – nice and clean and a good assortment of different types of seating
- Ceiling height – high in main area and nice height for airflow
- Roof leaks – only a few stained tiles noticed
- Ceiling tile condition – in good condition
- Meeting room size – large
- Shelving – metal – tall in the main area, short in the children's room
- End panels – wooden slat board
- Collection – the collection looks strong and in good condition. There were a few collections that were using the bottom shelves and may need to be weeded. Most shelves had room to add volumes.
- Reference Collection – the reference collection was located on a round shelving unit that was previously behind the former circulation desk. I would recommend weeding most of the reference collection at some point when space is needed for another collection that could go in that spot. Most libraries are getting rid of the majority of their reference collections since most reference questions can be answered using Google and the material in reference books is dated by the time they are published.
- Maker space – no
- Reference desk – was placed in a location in which the staff member could see the section of the library unseen from the welcoming desk.

- Natural light – adequate natural light
- Wi-Fi – easy to get on Wi-Fi and there was a strong signal
- Workspaces – there were plenty of spaces to work with easy access to power
- Cool seating – there was some cool seating in the teen area
- Artwork – an outdoor sculpture, an indoor sculpture, and a few framed posters
- Lockers – in staff breakroom
- Book lockers – no, the library has very good operating hours and I don't know if there is a need for 24/7 lockers in which people who have difficulty coming to the library can access reserves from a locker. There is plenty of space on the exterior of the building, but I wouldn't recommend this service at this time.
- Security – I felt very safe in the library. It is in a residential neighborhood.
- Patrons experiencing homelessness – I did not notice anyone that appeared to be experiencing homelessness

Final Notes: I enjoyed my stay at the Wells Branch Community Library. It is clear the library is an asset to the community. The landscaping and outdoor seating spaces are excellent. Meeting facilities are wonderful for the community. The only space I feel needs improving is the teen area and there seems to be plans to upgrade that space.

It was a pleasure going to a high functioning library. Normally when I do these assessments, there are a lot of deficiencies. The staff I spoke with all were friendly and were professional. Again, I often find libraries that are staffed with untrained staff members that have a book centric mentality. I can tell your staff were motivated to provide a high level of programming for the patrons.

No library has recovered from COVID. You are lucky to be a Library District in which you can deal with the pandemic the way you feel is best for your staff and patrons. I applaud using the data provided by the county to decide when you will open services and spaces further.