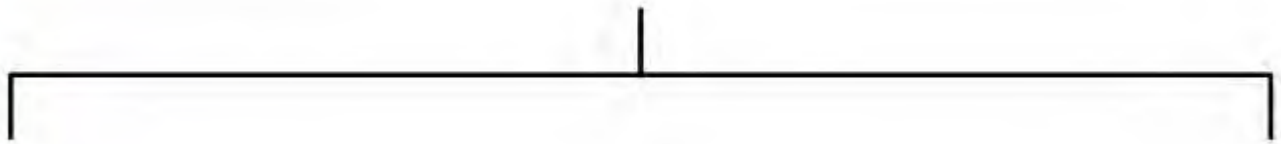# Decorah Public Library

SPACE AUDIT

This is the space audit for the Decorah Public Library.

Based on a visit to the library and discussion with the staff as well as a review of your blueprints and a detailed examination of photos and video, this audit gives you recommendations on specific steps you can take to improve your space utilization.

The objective is to make the library easier to use and to increase visits, circulation and discovery. The ultimate goal is to make the Decorah Public Library the preferred destination to answer the question "What should I read/see/watch/do next?"
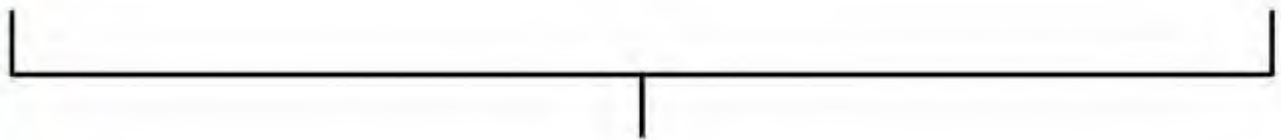
ThirdWay Qualifications

ThirdWay is the only space planning firm dedicated to bringing retail analytics and patron research techniques from leading consumer companies to public, academic and specialty libraries.
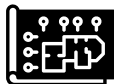
Recent Work - 2022

TRAINING

- **Alaska State Library** - Fairbanks, Anchorage, Juneau
- **Virginia State Library** - Norfolk, Fredericksburg
- **Tennessee State Library** - Dickson, TN
- **Iowa State Library** - Council Bluffs, Des Moines, Waterloo
- **Winding Rivers Library System** - West Salem, Wisconsin
- **RAILS** - Elgin, Burr Ridge, Barrington Area, IL
- **MAIN** - Long Hill Township, NJ

MASTER PLANS

- **Whitehall Public Library** - Wisconsin
- **Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation Tribal Library** - Utah
- **Jersey City Public Library** - Priscilla Gardner Main Library - NJ
- **Matteson Community Public Library** - IL

RENOVATIONS COMPLETED

- **Chetco Community Public Library** - Brookings, Oregon

Library Space Planning
A PLA Guide
David Vinjamun

CONFERENCES

- **American Library Association National Conference** - DC
- **Illinois Library Association** - Chicago
- **New Mexico Library Association** (Pre-conference workshop) - Albuquerque

SPACE AUDITS

- Albuquerque Academy - New Mexico
- Manhattan Elwood Public Library - Illinois
- Elk Grove Public Library - Illinois
- Oshkosh Public Library - Wisconsin
- Jersey City Public Library - NJ
- Tomah Public Library - Wisconsin
- Matteson Area Public Library - Illinois
- Mamaroneck Public Library - NY
- Palatine Public Library - IL
- Mokena Community Public Library - IL
- Winnetka Public Library Main Branch - IL
- Winnetka Public Library Northfield Branch - IL
- Fremont Public Library - IL
- Peotone Public Library - IL
- Hoboken Public Library - NJ

OVERVIEW

The Decorah Public Library is a unique building, combining a renovated, historic Post Office and a modern 1997 addition which preserves some of the façade of the former Post Office in its visually dramatic interior. The library has two additional levels – a lower level containing a community room and various municipal offices and a mezzanine which is open to the main floor.

The entry experience is confusing. The – very visible - original entrances to the historic post office are closed, and it is somewhat difficult to locate the modern, accessible library entrance. That entrance brings patrons to a sort of purgatory – an in-between level that forces patrons to climb or descend stairs or an elevator to reach any functional space in the building moving up or down stairs or an elevator to reach any level of the building. While the structure is visually dramatic, the effectiveness of the space is severely hindered by a lack of acoustic separation.

Three primary issues hinder the functionality of this library:

1. **Noise** – The library transmits sound exceptionally well. Leaving the old post office completely open to the new building with no sound insulation and constructing an open mezzanine created a large echo chamber.

2. **Meeting Rooms** – The library has only two study rooms and one large program room with acoustic separation. The mezzanine – an ideal space for Storytime and programs – is hampered by noise transmission. The study rooms are located on the mezzanine.

3. **Levels and Navigation** – The confusing entrance may require an architectural solution, but better navigational signage will help. The lower level is a challenge. It is not naturally a patron space – with a municipal design and an office orientation. Consolidating patron functions to two levels (main and mezzanine) would help.

Key Observations

These are the most pressing issues observed during the space audit visit or gleaned from staff.

Entrance/Exit – The entry and exit experience is confusing, as the main entrance to the library is neither the most visible entrance (the legacy entrances to the post office are easier to spot) nor does it lead directly into an active area.

Program Space – The only sound-isolated program space in the library is on the lower level, a municipal office space that the library shares. The mezzanine could be an excellent program space but is compromised by noise transmission.

Display – The staff has created excellent displays, but the library should transition to a marketplace model.

Children – Mobile shelving including flip-bin shelving would help the children's room be more flexible. The current layout tries to incorporate a reasonable collection with interactives, a toddler play area, a crafting area and some juvenile and family seating. The result is a layout that feels like each area is tightly compressed. Flexible shelving and furniture would allow the library to repurpose space as the age range of the children in the library evolves during the day.

Collaboration – Noise in this library doesn't only hinder concentration – it makes collaboration more difficult. Because adults are so attuned to the noise that children and teens can make when they're in the library, they are less likely to engage in collaborative work when those disruptive voices are not present. Anything from a tutoring session to a chat with a friend can be uncomfortable in the library when young children are not present.

Seating – Adult seating in this library is insufficient. The seating is mostly traditional, and the limited casual seating is not movable – so it creates a defined social relationship between patrons that may violate their territoriality.

Work Surfaces – The work surfaces in the library are mostly traditional – hard wooden tables, laptop counters and wooden study carrels. Better work surfaces and options would allow for more patrons to coexist within the library space.

Lover Level – The lower level is divorced from the rest of the library. While it allows for an easy entrance from the parking lot, it feels municipal and does not engage patrons with the library at all beyond the specific program they are attending..

Study and Tutoring – The library has just two rooms (on the mezzanine) for individual or small group study. Even if a few are added, they could quickly be overwhelmed by patrons seeking to make a phone call or conduct a single Zoom meeting over an afternoon. Pairing study rooms with Workpods or phonebooths/meeting booths will help ensure that each are used appropriately.

Main Floor – Work and Connection

This plan reorganizes the main floor of the library. The children move to the historic wing which is sound-insulated with glass walls and doors. Two study rooms are moved to this level, and a meeting room is added. Part of the adult space can be cleared to add another event space.

Shelving – This plan keeps the collection size relatively stable. Stacks on the main floor are consolidated down to 4-5runs of tall shelving.

Service Points – The service desk becomes a smaller staff station with a self-checkout station beside it. This is closer to the circulation workroom and allows space for a marketplace at the entrance to the floor.

Marketplace – Patrons are greeted by a set of curated displays on the main floor, displaying both new items and items from the collection with each display being thematic or topical.

Glass Wall – The most important glass to be added on this floor separates the new building from the old. Two glass doors allow movement between old and new buildings.

Workpods/Carrels – The library will retain a limited number of desktop computers but will add Workpods (see example on page 18) for study and laptop use.

Phone/Meeting Booth – Adding 1 and 2-person sound insulated booths will give the library a space for patrons for tutoring, Zoom calls and phone calls.

Movable Tables – Individual tables that can be combined. This area can also be cleared for events or programs.

Movable Casual Seating – Seating that is appropriate for the space but can be moved easily.

Nursing/Sensory – Set in the children's library and between the offices of the Director and Assistant Director, a small, movable room can be used for calming or nursing.

Main Floor Zone Plan
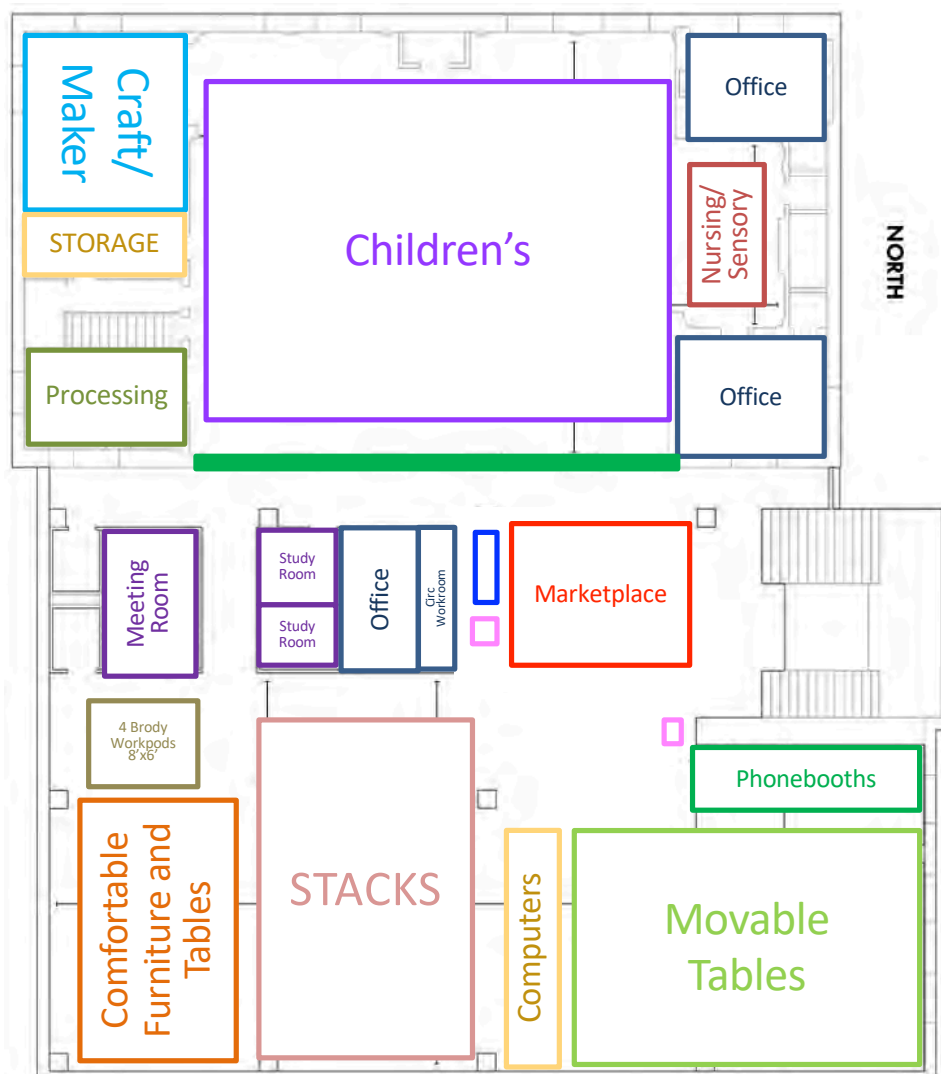
1. **Service Points** – A two-person desk in front of the circulation office -
2. **Self Checkout** – 2-3 self checkout stations, at least one on the exit pathway.
3. **Marketplace** – A set of merchandised displays organized by topic/interest.
4. **Offices** – Kristin/Zach/Tricia have offices on this level.
5. **Children's Room** – Children's Room is separated with a glass partition.
6. **Nursing/Sensory** – A calming space for lactation or children.
7. **Study/Meeting** – Two study rooms and one meeting room.
8. **Movable Tables** – This area becomes a multipurpose zone: active seating area for caregivers, seniors, teens, etc. but also a program space when needed.
9. **Workpods** – 4 Steelcase Brody Workpods, observable from library leadership offices.
10. **Phonebooths** – 1 and 2-person self-standing meeting pods (sound insulated).
11. **Computers** – A limited number of desktop computers.
12. **Stacks** – Stacks become a room divider with four uninterrupted rows of 40' stacks.
13. **Comfortable Furniture and Tables** – Casual furniture and individual tables.
14. **Storage** – Combining several closest to allow for some chair storage for events.
15. **Craft/Maker Room** – Office becomes a crafting and maker space for children.
16. **Processing** – Room adjacent to receiving becomes a processing workstation.

Mezzanine – Program Space

The Mezzanine of the Decorah Public Library is an enchanting space that is compromised by a lack of acoustic separation, dated furniture and storage space to reset the space. It is larger than the program room on the lower floor of the library.

Program Area – This area becomes the central program space for the library. It can be reset to be a Storytime area, a teen or adult program space or a meeting space with tables.

Screen – A full A/V system is added to this room to allow for use for movies, multimedia and meetings.

Storage – Two small study rooms are converted into one storage space that allows tables and chairs to be stowed or deployed..

Service Point – A single service point can be moved as needed.

Mezzanine Zone Plan
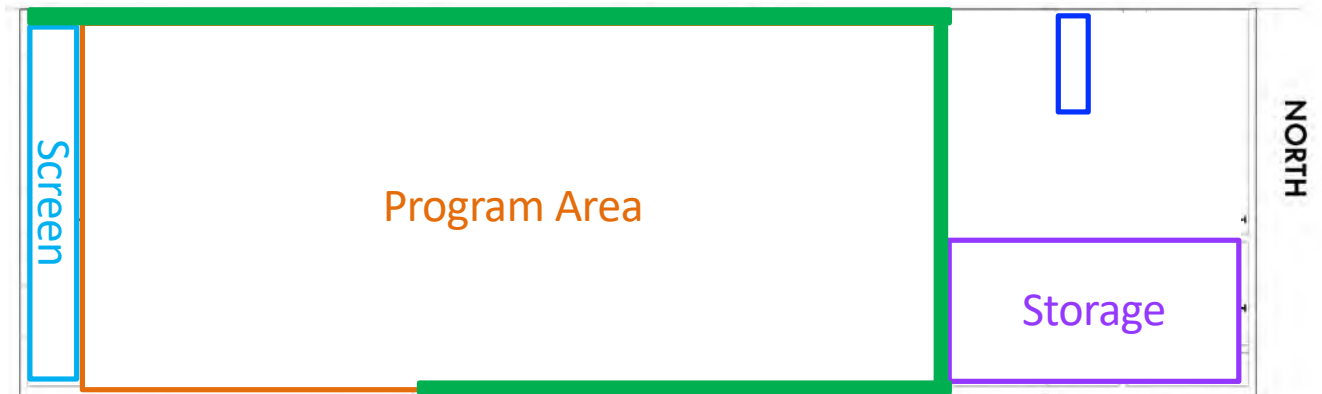
1. <u>Service Points</u> – A single service point for program check-in or to monitor when used for children.
2. <u>Glass Walls</u> – Room is sound-insulated
3. <u>Screen</u> – Large screen for movies and presentations/events.
4. <u>Program Area</u> – This area is larger than the existing lower-level community room.
5. <u>Storage</u> – Chair/Table storage for events.

Lower Level – Staff Area

In this plan, the lower level becomes a staff-only area. Two single offices, a double office and a workroom are located on the lower level as well as a staff lounge.
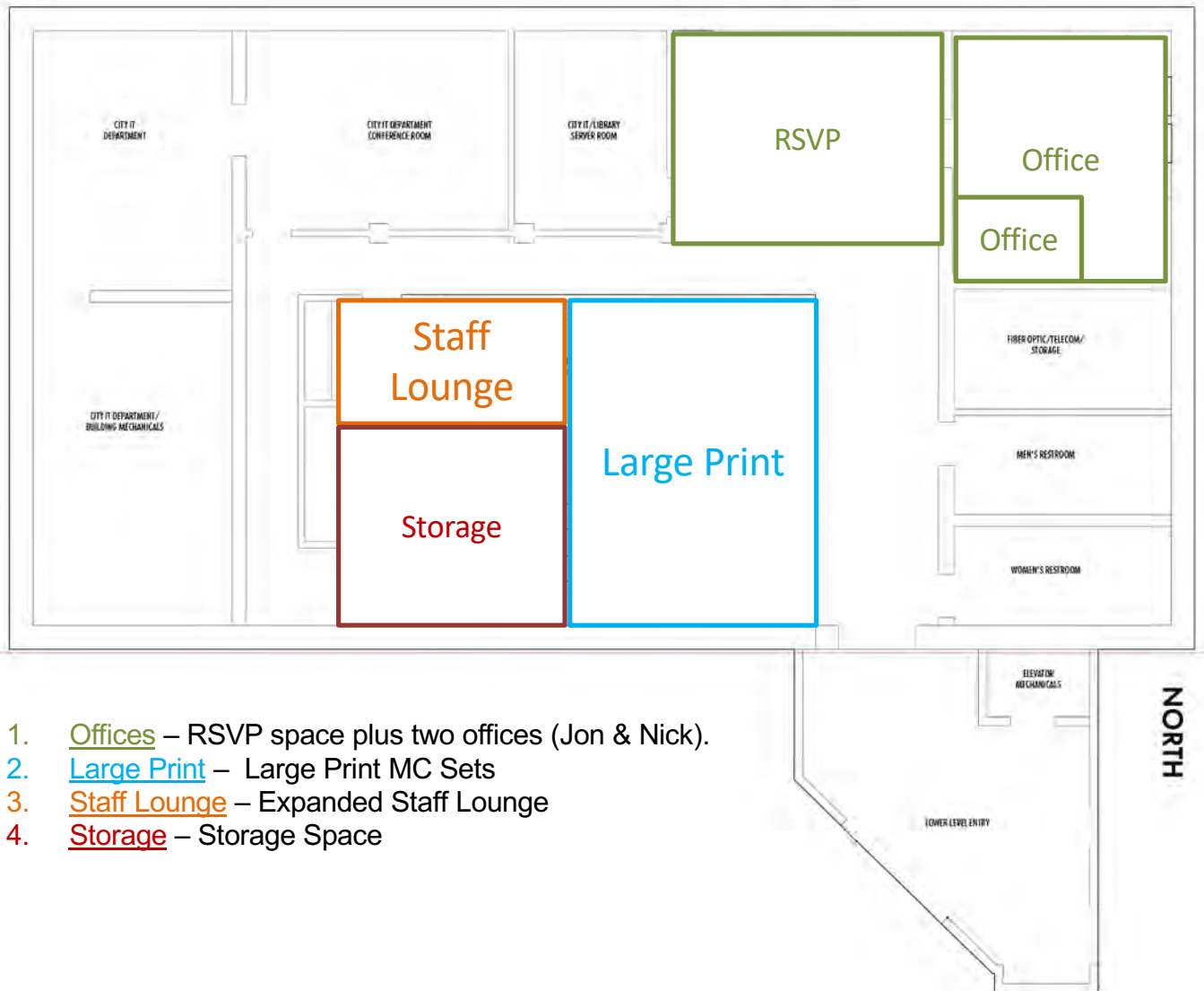
Staff Lounge – The staff lounge is in a more private space on a floor that is staff-dedicated.

Offices – Two individual offices and space for RSVP.

Large Print – Space for the Large Print MC Sets.

Storage – Storage space.

Lower-Level Zone Plan

1. <u>Offices</u> – RSVP space plus two offices (Jon & Nick).
2. <u>Large Print</u> – Large Print MC Sets
3. <u>Staff Lounge</u> – Expanded Staff Lounge
4. <u>Storage</u> – Storage Space

Children's Room Zone Plan

The children's room moves to the historic wing of the library, expanding the space available for children. All shelving is mobile, allowing the initial zone plan to be reconfigured based on need. A craft/maker room is added in the current RSVP space.

Crafting/Maker – This plan moves the RSVP office to the lower level and coverts this space to a maker/craft workroom adjacent to an area of mobile tables.

Shelving – This plan keeps the collection size stable. Taller, mobile flip-bin shelving (such as LFI) allows the footprint of board and picture books to shrink. Shelving for other juvenile books and collection items is also mobile, with the height being determined as a tradeoff between accessibility and space for seating.

Service Points – The service desk becomes a single person station with a self-checkout station beside it.

Engagement Zone – Instead of separate areas for interactives and toddler play, an integrated zone could focus on deep interactives with a wider age range compatibility.

Focus Zone/Family Seating – Casual, movable furniture for both adults and children with some heavier pieces situated near walls/windows where they will least inhibit the flexibility of the space.

Combinable Tables – This active zone can be a craft area, afterschool work area or a social space.
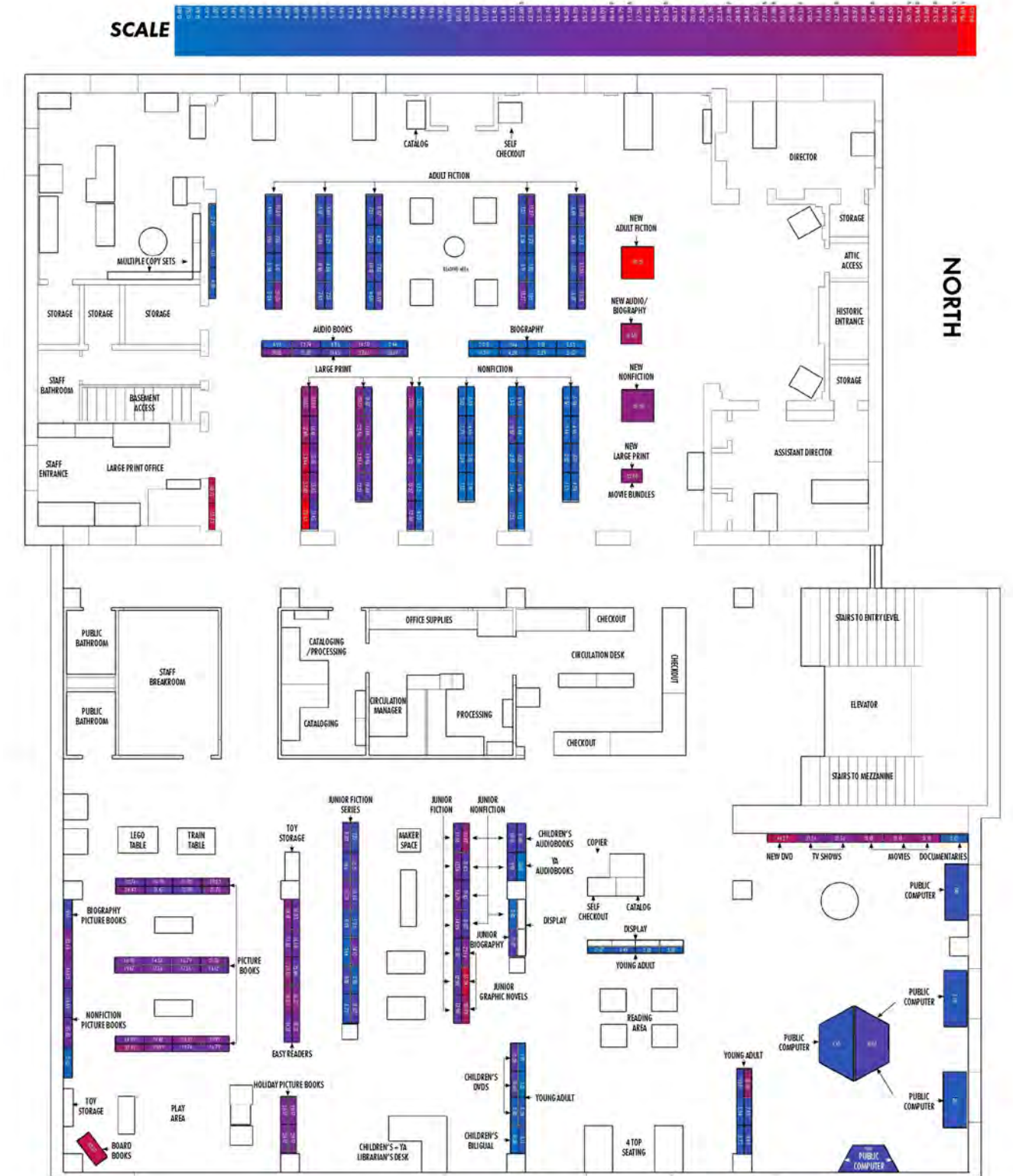
Children's Room Zone Plan
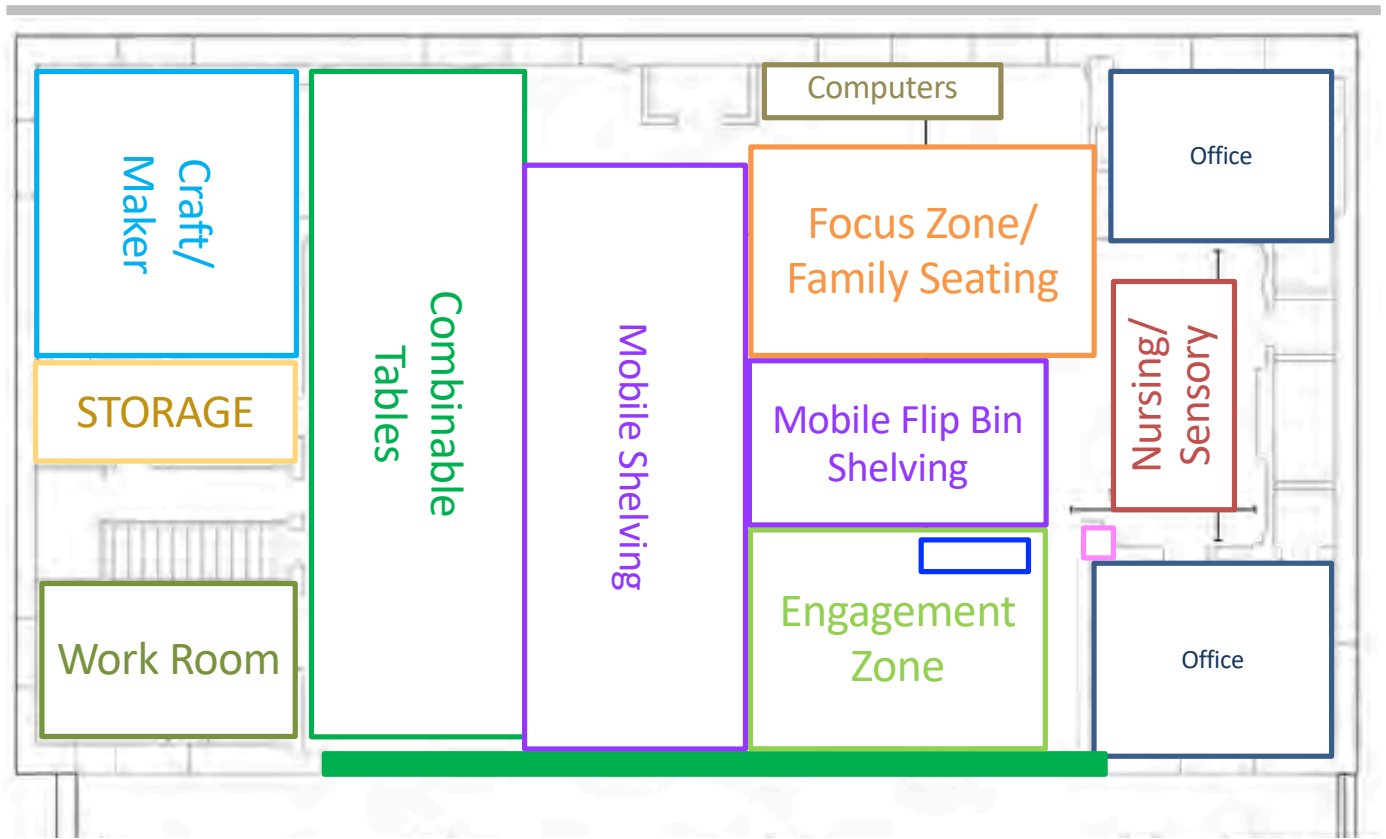
1. <u>Service Points</u> – A movable desk near the youth entrance.
2. <u>Self Checkout</u> – One self-checkout stations on the exit pathway.
3. <u>Offices</u> – Director and Assistant Director Offices.
4. <u>Shelving</u> – All shelving in this room is mobile.
5. <u>Nursing/Sensory</u> – A calming space for lactation or children.
6. <u>Engagement Zone</u> – A space with interactives (ideally engaging through primary school age.)
7. <u>Combinable Tables</u> – Individual, combinable tables, appealing to older children.
8. <u>Computers</u> – A limited number of desktop computers.
9. <u>Focus Zone/Family Seating</u> – Casual furniture for children and parents.
10. <u>Storage</u>
11. <u>Craft/Maker Room</u> – Office becomes a crafting and maker space for children.
12. <u>Work Room</u> – Room adjacent to receiving porch becomes a mudroom/workroom.

Children's Room Zone Plan

Engagement Zone

Mobile Flip Bin Shelving

Focus Zone/ Family Seating

Combinable Tables

Mobile Shelving
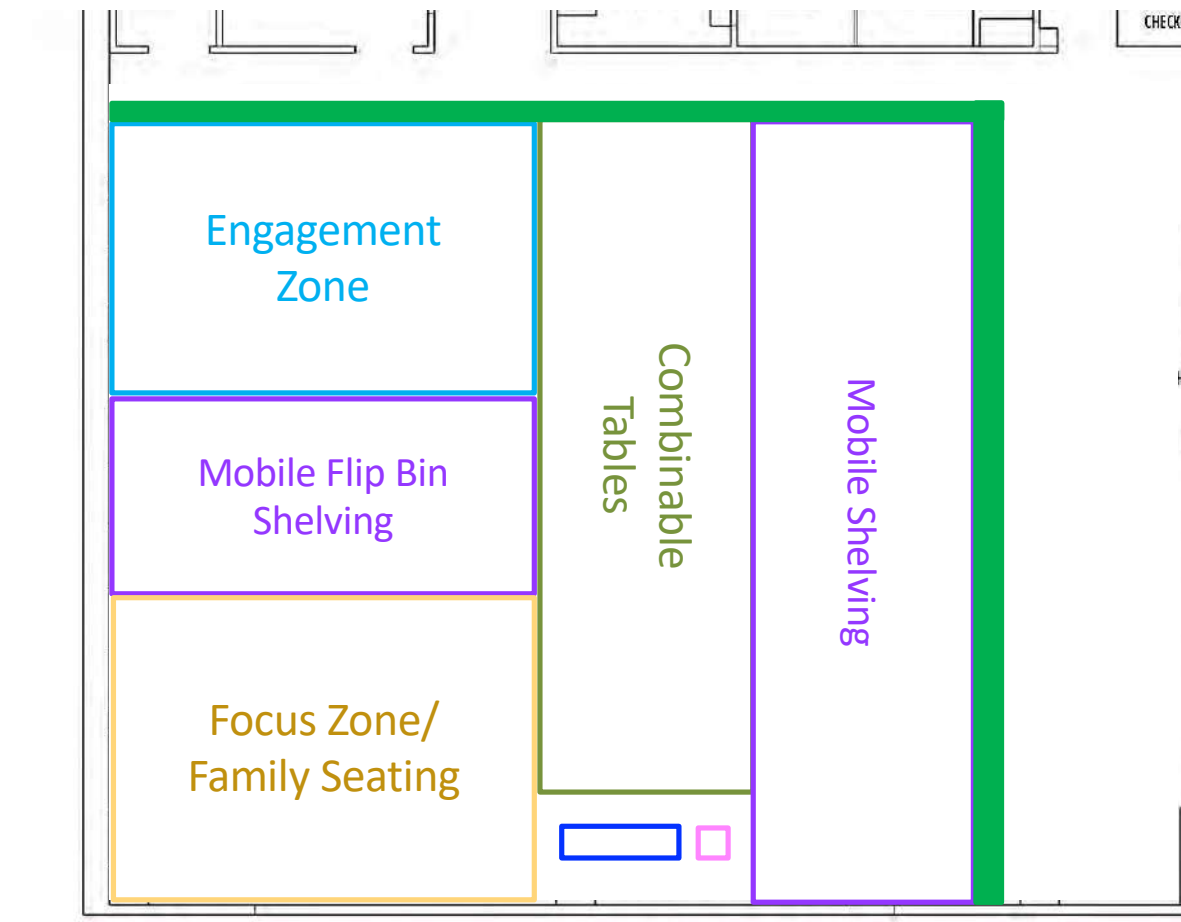
CHECK

1. Service Points – A single service desk in the children's room can be staffed when the room is busy.
2. Self Checkout – A self-checkout station next to the service desk.
3. Engagement Zone – The active area with interactive elements – flexes pre-school – elementary age.
4. Shelving – All shelving in the children's room is movable. Picture/board books in bin shelving.
5. Combinable Tables – Kid tables that can be combined for group projects.
6. Focus Zone/Family Seating – Area for individual seating or caregiver reading.

Heat Map Observations

The starkest data from the heat map.

Rule of 3 Display – Display is effective in this library, and Rule-of-3 Display is the most effective display.

Marketplace – Both fiction and nonfiction stacks perform poorly relative to merchandised displays. A marketplace strategy is necessary to effectively circulate older collection items.

Face Out on End Shelves– The central pathway in the adult zone is not effective as evidenced by the low circulation on biography. A better strategy would be to consolidate the stacks into longer runs, and then window or fully display books on exterior (end) shelves.

Large Print Collection – Large print and movies both enjoy good circulation. Moving them to the lower level will make the journey easier for patrons with limited mobility and each is enough of a draw to make the space effective.

Childrens – Children's circulation is not as strong as expected compared to adult circulation. Better mobile shelving units, flip bin storage and consistent merchandising will help.

RECOMMENDATION – Movable tables

BEST PRACTICE
Westport Public Library

RECOMMENDATION – Mobile Shelving

BEST PRACTICE

MEETING PODS & PHONE BOOTH

BEST PRACTICE

RECOMMENDATION

BEST PRACTICE

Reducing the number of desktop computers and adding study pods into the mix of seating and work surface options can greatly improve the utilization of seating. These pods are a very space-efficient seating option and can work with or without direct power. They are ideal for laptop use but also for studying, reading, drafting, drawing and other projects.

This is a gorgeous legacy building (and old post office) that is connected to a small addition.

RECOMMENDATION

The book return is clearly marked.

RECOMMENDATION

The legacy entrances to the post office are not in use, which makes it trickier to navigate to the modern space. Permanent (and larger) signage should be used to guide patrons to the active entrance.

BEST PRACTICES

The Madison Public Library's Alicia Ashman Branch shows how font choice and signage can convey the personality of the library. Of note here is not only the interplay between the two signs but also the lamps above, and the design of the archway entrance. Note the banner hanging just to the right.

RECOMMENDATION

This stencil is easy to read and much better than the signs sitting behind the glass.
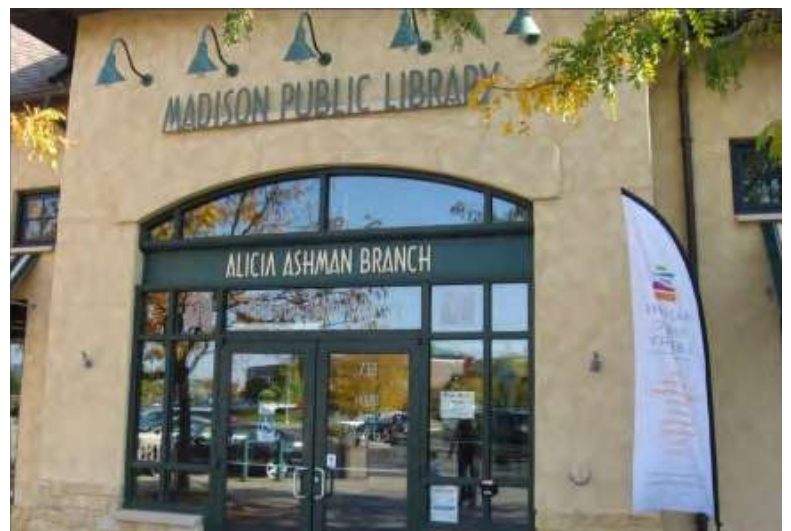
RECOMMENDATION

This sign is very clear and professionally produced.

This is a fascinating sign as it hints but does not reveal the extent to which the bottom four services are co-located with the library.

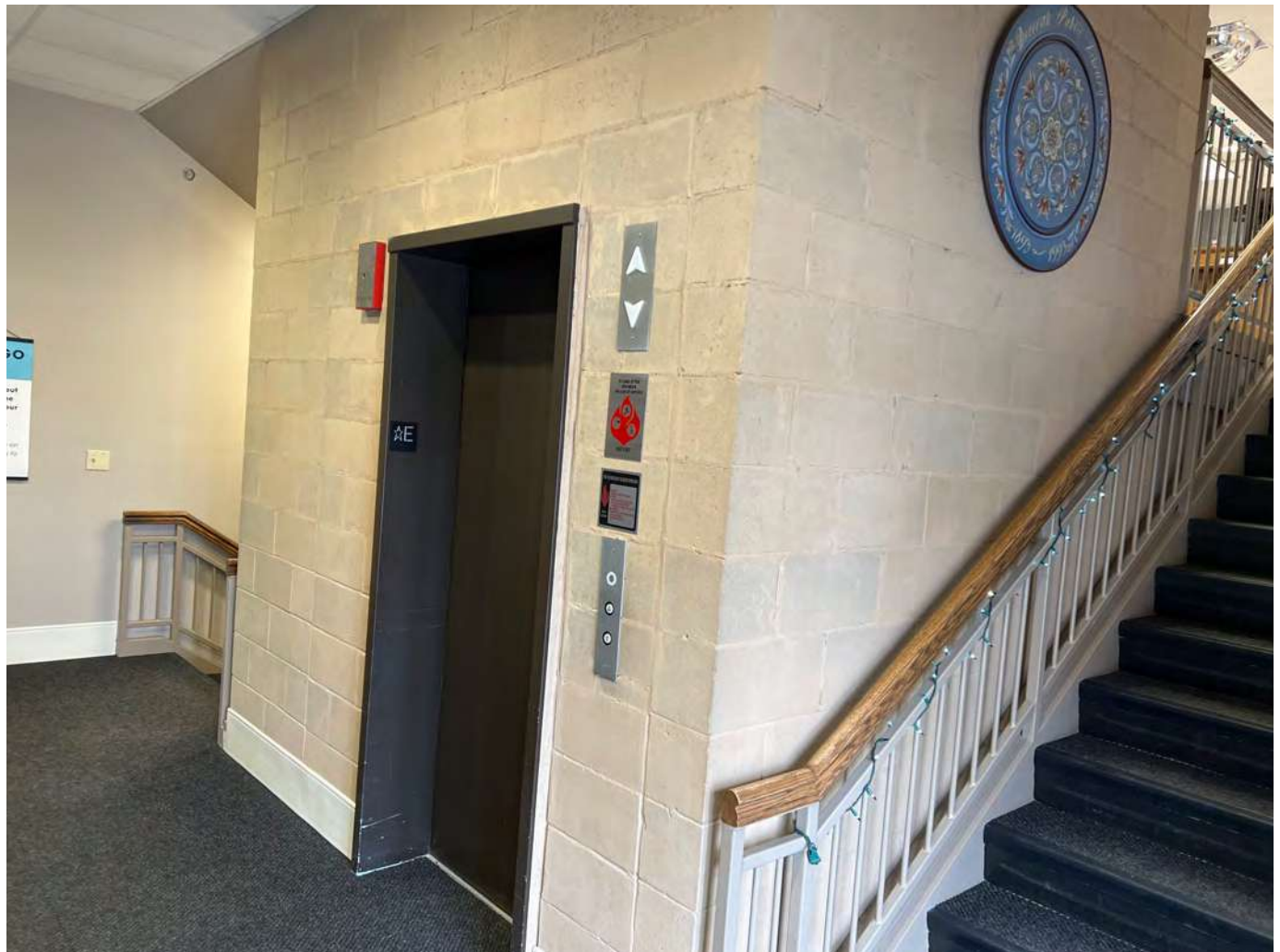This is colorful signage, but a window cling or etching might be better in the long term.

Patrons have some difficulty focusing on 8.5" x 11" handouts as they appear to be book covers in the peripheral vision.

RECOMMENDATION

The elevator well is part of the new building but shares some design dna with the older structure. There is no signage here to help patrons determine whether to move upwards or downwards.

BEST PRACTICE

Professional signage that has a clear taxonomy (Using size, shape, color, font and position) that is consistent and tells the patron what type of information it contains is critical. When signage has a clear taxonomy, patrons will 'read' the sign if their brain tells them it contains relevant information.

This is a good way of ensuring that patrons who want them can get their reserves easily. This gives the library permission to put any other regular reserves further back in the library space.

RECOMMENDATION

This is an exceptionally large circulation desk for this sized library.   A smaller greeting station or staff point would free up room for a small marketplace here.

BEST PRACTICES

The first person a patron sees upon entering the library should be in the direct sightline, and not behind a barrier or obstacle like an imposing desk with plexiglass shielding. This person's primary responsibility should should be helping patrons with wayfinding and answering questions. Trained staff members who can quickly discern whether a patron needs help and quickly determine how to assist are ideal in the entry area. The first staff member a patron encounters should not be behind an enormous circulation desk.

RECOMMENDATION

There are numerous competing signs here (7 in the photo plus brochures and a face mask box). Visual clutter makes it harder for patrons to focus on anything and can hinder wayfinding.

RECOMMENDATION

The children's room is not marked, and it does not appear to be separate from the adult space.

BEST PRACTICES

Gail Borden Library has one of the best childrens' areas

This board might be effective if patrons have been trained to read and use it, but an interactive digital community board could be programmed with removal dates for notices and allow patrons to browse areas of interest.

A signage taxonomy will allow event-related signs to be seen and read by the right patrons without blocking the stairway.

RECOMMENDATION

This elevator is not well signed, and surrounded by visual clutter.
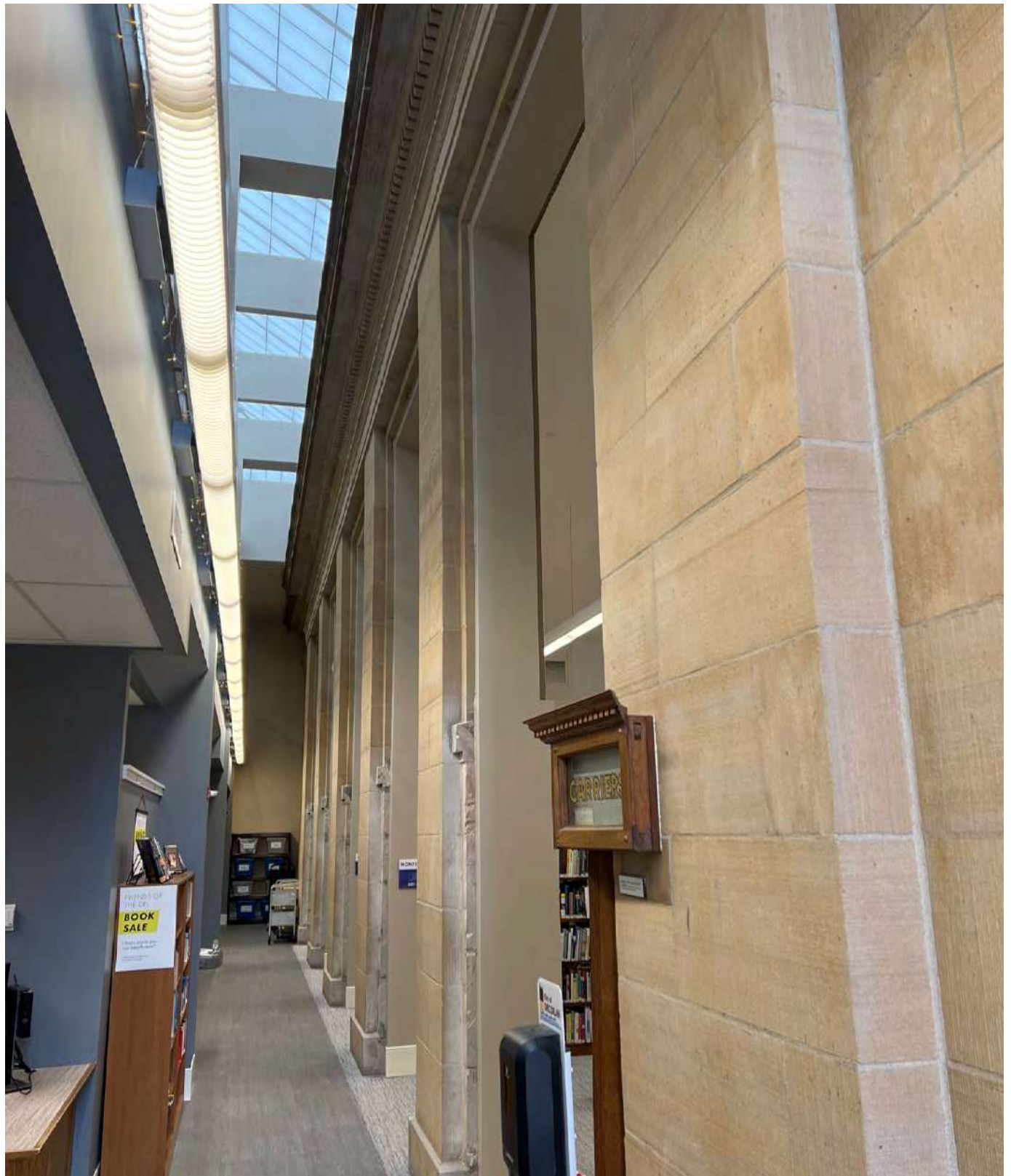
The old post office building is gorgeous and the connector is dramatic. However the lack of any sound barrier between the two spaces dramatically decreases the overall flexibility of the library.

RECOMMENDATION

This is a clever idea. Setting off the theme (Love Triangle, Space to be Great, etc.) and the movie titles in a contrasting color might make it easier to browse.

It's painful to follow the rule of three when five books fit so neatly, but still important. Consider adding an understock shelf.

RECOMMENDATION

This display does not follow the rule of 3 (on a long horizontal shelf, use foam core or other barriers to create visual breaks. Also, new books should be displayed with older titles by interest in a marketplace.

This is an excellent example of the Rule of 3:

BEST PRACTICE

To merchandise effectively, exactly 3 items should be on each level of a display. Where there is a visual break - like a shelf divider - 3 more items can be placed in the next horizontal space. 5 items on a shelf or 1 item on a shelf will not circulate as well as 3, and even numbers of items don't give the eye an easy central point of focus, so they will be much less efficient. To keep a display unit following the Rule of 3 in stock (i.e. filled), add at least one row of understock at the bottom of the display. Understock is a row of items that are put spine-in for space efficiency. Every staff member should be responsible for replacing items missing from a display with understock whenever they see gaps in the display.

RECOMMENDATION

Instead of displaying an item face out on each shelf, window the shelf - see the picture of the same shelf on the next page.

BEST PRACTICE

Instead of leaving top or bottom shelves empty and instead of displaying face-out items next to spine-in items on multiple shelves, window the display. Remove all items from one shelf at eye level, and replace with three items face out on easels. Windowing has three effects: 1. It creates a well-merchandised "Rule of 3" display in the middle of a tall shelving unit. 2. It creates a visual anchor for the shelf: by looking at the face out items, patrons can get a sense of what is shelved above and below. 3. It allows patrons to see through the tall shelving and allows light to get through. This makes the stacks feel less claustrophobic and more social.

These well-merchandised display units help define a clear pathway through the space. Don't be afraid to create understock for the movie night bundles.

A stronger signage taxonomy might use visual icons to help patrons navigate Dewey.

RECOMMENDATION

This is the right amount of space and a good location for the Friends sale. Perfectly merchandising this display will improve sales.

RECOMMENDATION

The front room of the old post office is an elegant space, but shelving dominates the floor.

RECOMMENDATION

This is a lovely seating area, but since the pandemic, patrons want to be able to define their social relationship with strangers, including angle and seating distance. Creating seating spaces that allow patrons to move their seating according to their own preferences is important.

BEST PRACTICES

RECOMMENDATION

A small staff breakroom would be more appropriately sized as two study rooms.

RECOMMENDATION

There is no space in this library for collaborative work.

RECOMMENDATION

This is one of the nicest rooms in the old building and it might make a great small meeting room. It seems dramatically under-utilized as staff space.
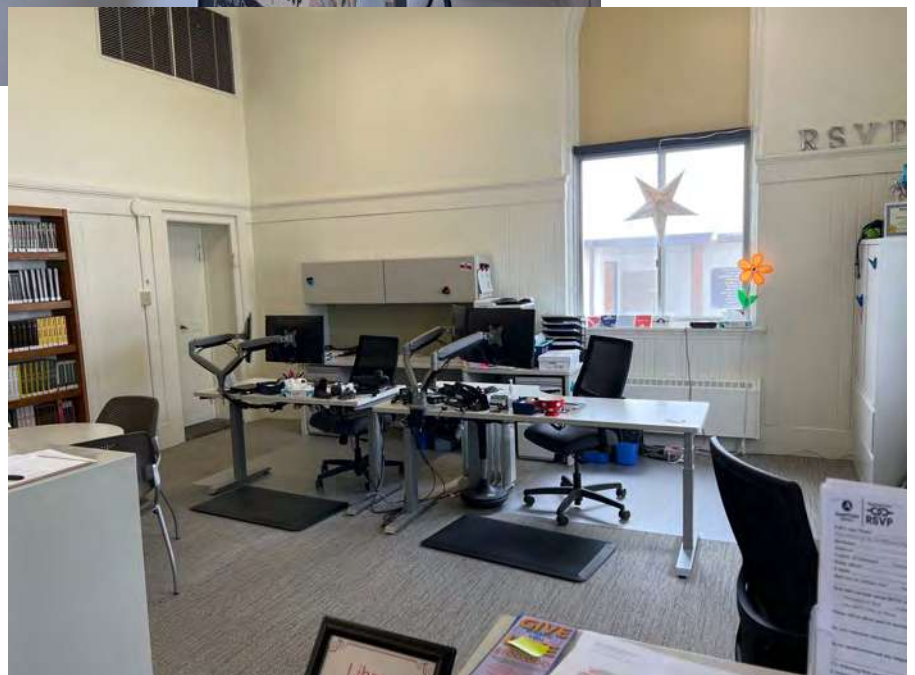
RECOMMENDATION

If receiving for this facility goes beyond UPS book boxes, then this is probably the right space.

A summer staff outdoor break area?

This space in the new structure behind the circulation desk would be ideal for two centrally-located small meeting rooms if appropriate staff space could be found.

RECOMMENDATION

This is a lovely craft display with good refuge seating.

RECOMMENDATION

The mezzanine is a tricky space because it can never be quiet (any noise downstairs is amplified in this space) and when fully active it floods the entire building with sound. Regardless of the eventual use, this space should be sound-isolated.

RECOMMENDATION

The mezzanine is framed out and could be sound isolated. Below, see an example of double-paned glass with an air gap.

Descending to the basement really feels like leaving the library behind.
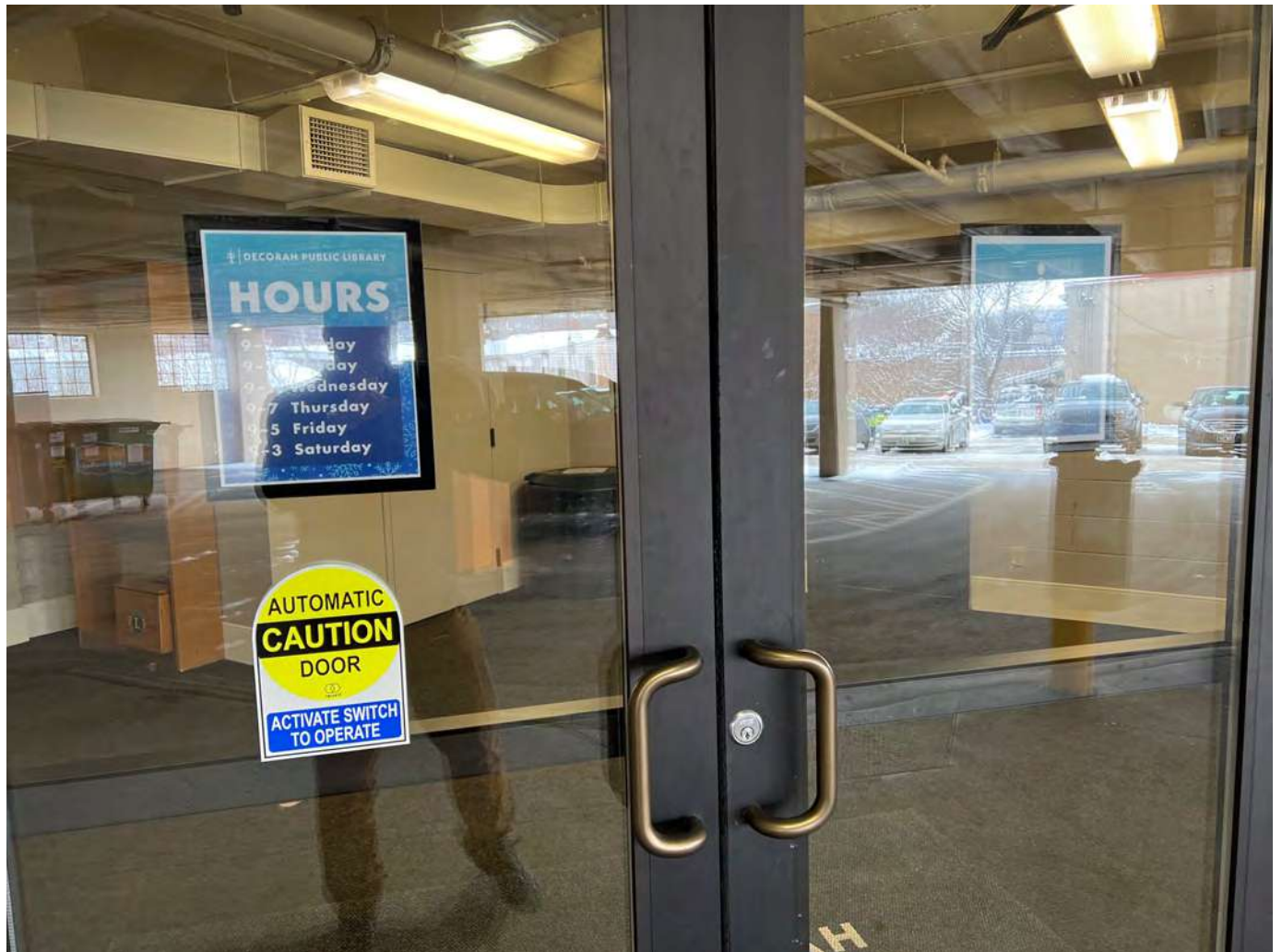
Signs placed behind glass can easily become difficult to read with reflections from ambient light

RECOMMENDATION

This entry space is devoid of context or directional signage.

This is a good delivery point, and the signage is clear.

RECOMMENDATION

This is not a great space for a public program room. It feels subterranean and has none of the charm of the rest of the library. It would make more sense to have the entire lower floor function as a modern office suite.

There appears to be extra space in this office suite.
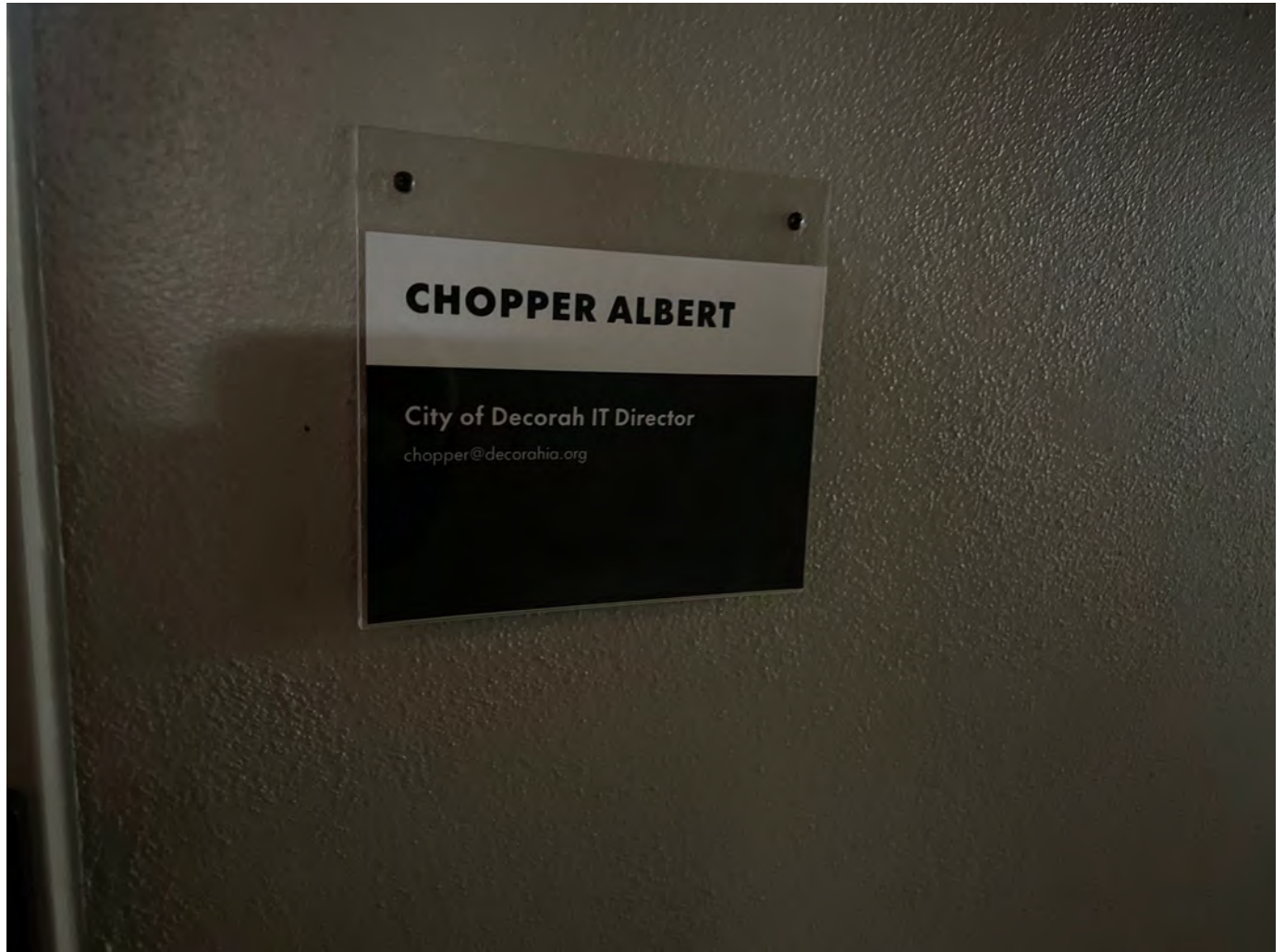
Does the library share space with the city?

RECOMMENDATION

These study rooms are in an awkward space. It might make more sense to turn them into a storage area, allowing the mezzanine to be reset between use as a children's space after storytime and for quiet reading in the early afternoon and programs in the after-school and evening hours.

RECOMMENDATION

These stacked chairs hint at the lack of storage.

RECOMMENDATION

Magazines are useful for some patrons, but older copies should not be stored. Help library patrons use Zinio, Libby or other library online resources allowing access to these resources.

BEST PRACTICE

RECOMMENDATION
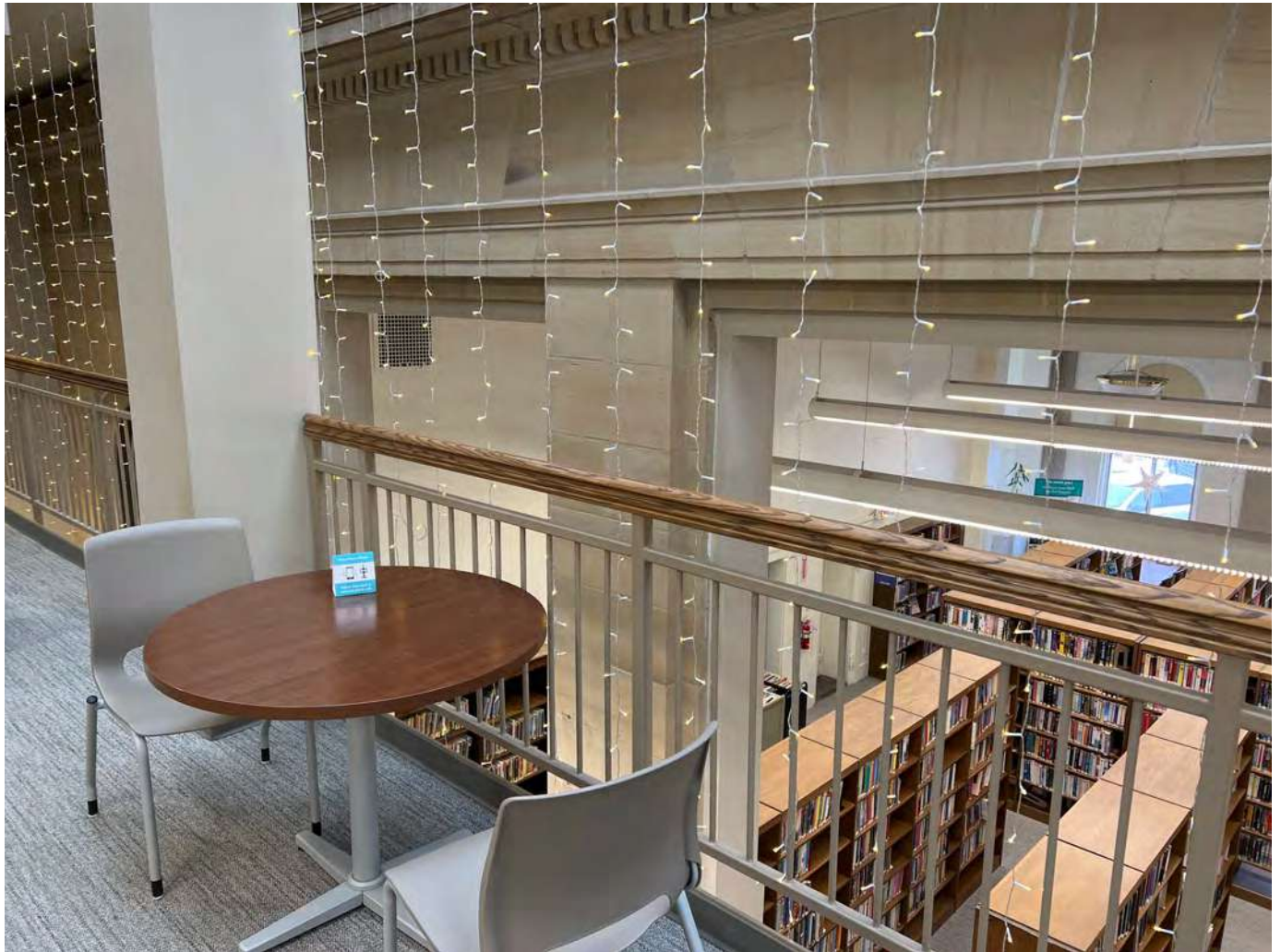

This is not an ideal spot for a staff cubicle.

RECORMENDATION

The motley crew of furniture seems like an oddly appropriate fit for a Toy Story-adjacent movie.

RECOMMENDATION

The fundamental problem for the mezzanine is right here - in the lack of a sound barrier between the mezzanine and lower floor and also the lack of any sound barrier between the older post office structure and the the newer library addition.
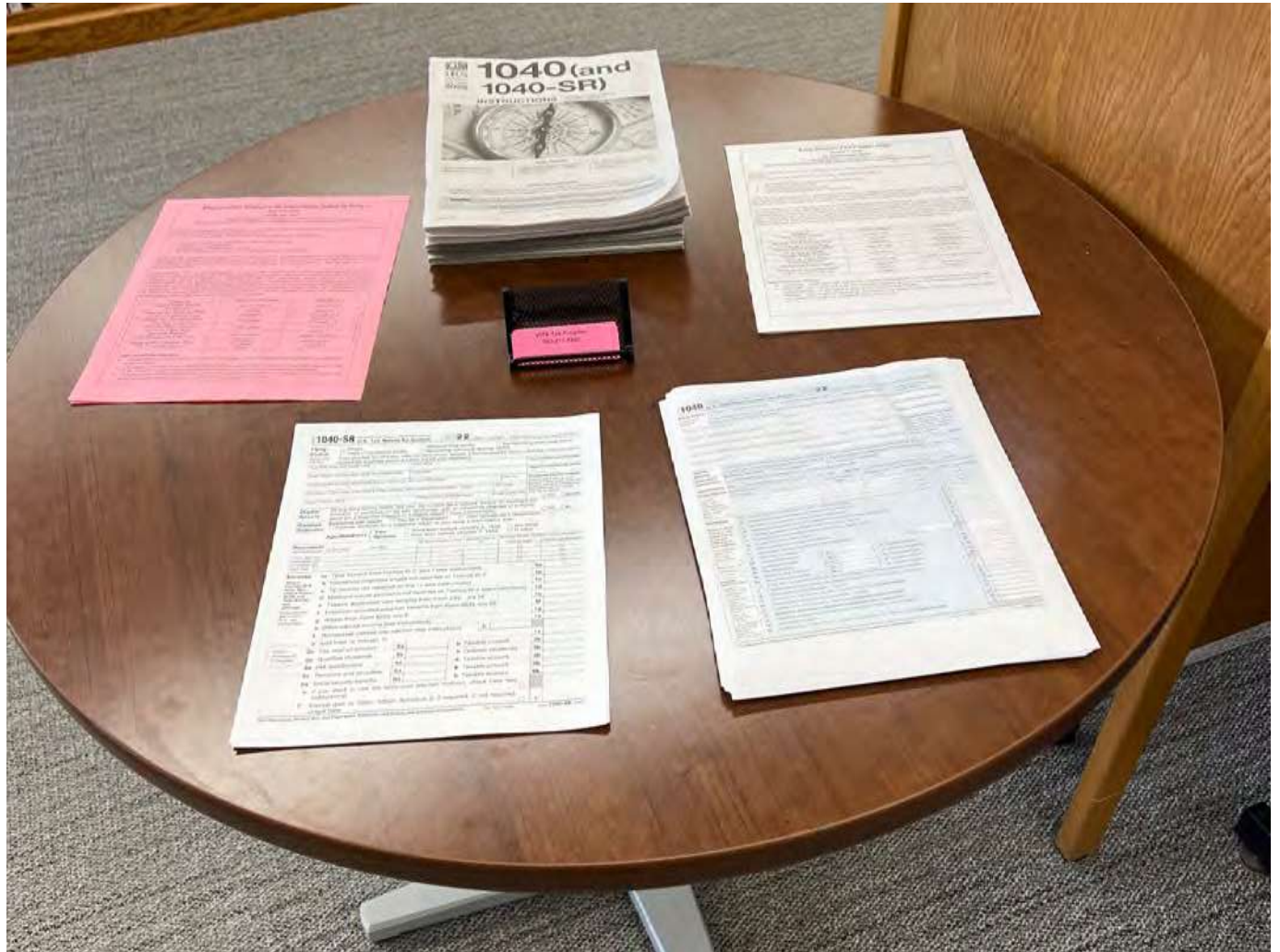
The front room in the addition is a lovely space.

A small business center makes sense near the front of the library, but this might not be the ideal spot.

RECOMMENDATION

Great to have tax forms out - a holder might use less space.

RECOMMENDATION

An important display. Should follow the rule of 3. This display breaks up this space so it might not be the ideal location.

The children's room is incredibly difficult to discern in this space.

It might be possible to frame out a children's room and a corridor along the lines of the drop ceiling here.

RECOMMENDATION

This side of the library should be the active space. It would be nice to make the front part of the space flexible to allow it to serve adults, teens and larger events like receptions or big programs that won't fit in the mezzanine. This would require a different setup for this space.

This shelf is almost perfectly merchandised. The second row on the left (blue) should have only 3 items. The top row is missing an item (red). The bottom row (green) could be used for understock to allow the missing items to be easily replaced.

Seating like this is inflexible and not ideal for this space if it is to flex between groups.

The children's librarian has a very good sense of how to optimize her space. Mobile shelving would dramatically improve her ability to remake this space - both dynamically during the day and when her patrons' overall needs change.

This is probably the right windowing strategy for 2/3 height patrons, but make sure to follow the rule of 3.

Great monitor display! Probably should be closer to the entrance of the children's space. Follow the rule of 3 for wall displays.

RECOMMENDATION

This is about the right size for a staff station, but a more friendly desk would make the children less likely to try and intrude behind the librarian.

BEST PRACTICE

The librarian has done a good job of defining zones with stacks. Mobile tables and shelving would allow the children's room to be dynamically reset during the day.

The inflexible shelving creates some odd nooks in the space.
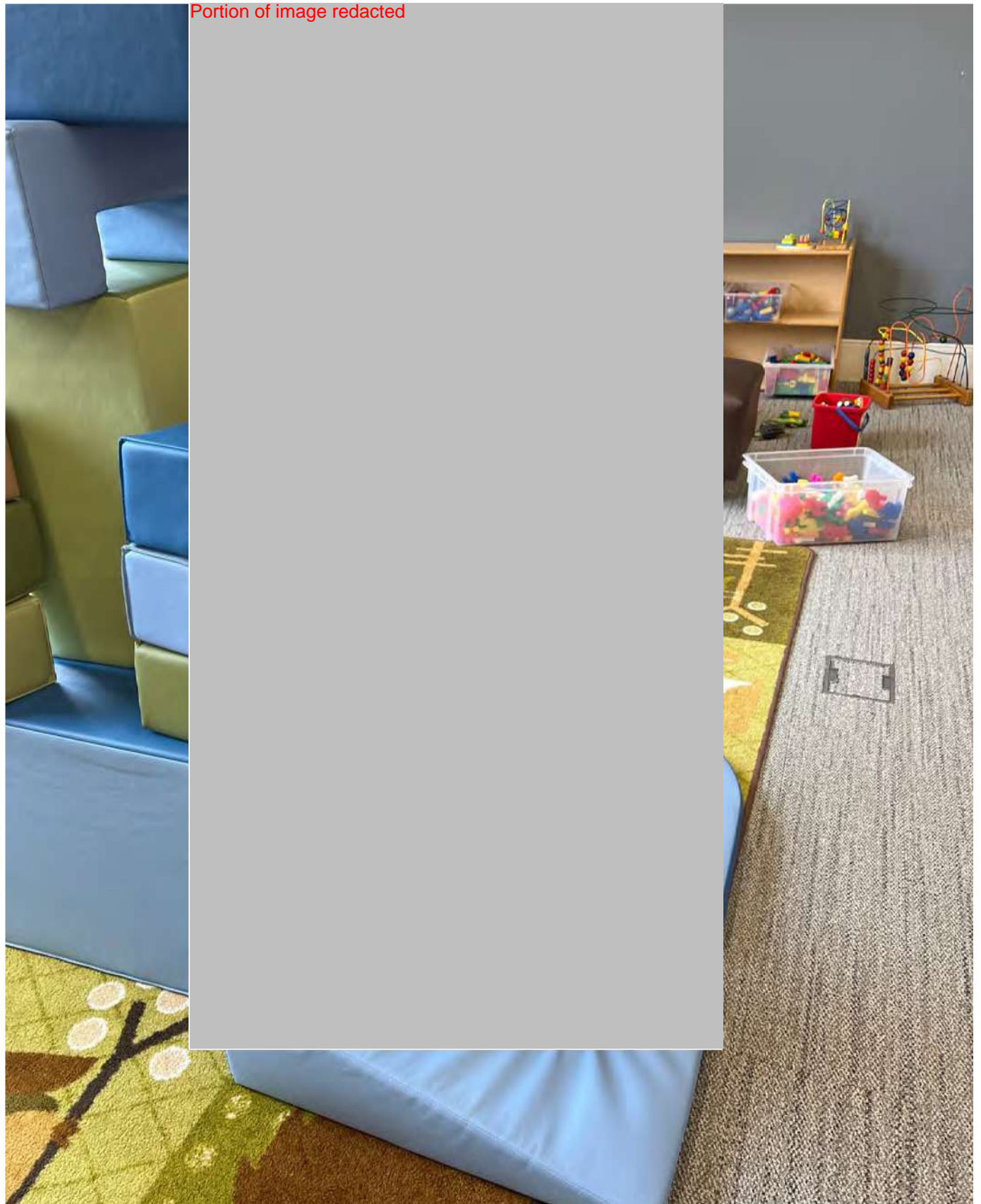
RECOMMENDATION

These bins are clearly labeled. Mobile shelving would aid the librarian in deploying them or even pushing them aside when not relevant.

Portion of image redacted

Young patrons who requested a photo.

RECOMMENDATION

This is the active space for the children's room. It should be able to expand in the morning and shift to lego play or other uses as the average age changes later in the day.

RECOMMENDATION

Topper displays present a special challenge. Either avoid them or use visual breaks like foam cores to create Rule of 3 displays. Adding mobile flip-bin shelving creates a better and more flexible browsing solution.

BEST PRACTICE

Mobile flip bin shelving units combine flexibility with ideal browsing for children's board books, picture books and graphic novels.

RECOMMENDATION

An interactive like a light brite wall or Boss Display mounted on the wall might do a better job of serving both young and older kids and allow for more flexible floor space.

BEST PRACTICE

A wall-mounted ball or gear display can attract multiple age children and allow a room to flex between groups. (Chetco Community Public Library, Brookings, OR)

This is a great idea!

RECOMMENDATION

Another space that might better serve the public if an alternate break room can be sourced.

RECOMMENDATION

The current meeting space has a beam that would allow walls the space to be divided with minimal difficulty.

CONTACT INFO

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