

OMAHA PUBLIC LIBRARY FACILITIES MASTER PLAN UPDATE 2017

BACKGROUND

Nearly seven years ago (2010), Himmel & Wilson, Library Consultants served as the primary library specialist for a major assessment the Omaha Public Library's (OPL) facilities. BCDM Architects of Omaha acted as the prime contractor for the project.

The resulting ***Omaha Public Library Facilities Master Plan***, submitted to the Library in September 2010, was expansive in its scope. It included an extensive set of reports documenting the condition and functionality of each of the OPL's twelve buildings. The study included operational analyses of each facility as well as branch-level architectural assessments, building-level engineering reviews, and even commercial property valuation appraisals for each site. Comprehensive branch-specific profiles were compiled that offered legal descriptions of properties, basic floor-plans, assessments of physical and mechanical shortcomings, as well as input, output, and derivative measures that summarized the relative public service performance of each facility.

The 2010 Master Plan also offered recommendations for the development of new facilities and the expansion/renovation of others that were designed to enable OPL to adequately serve Douglas County's growing population. Suggestions were provided for both small, short-term projects and for major, long-range efforts including the replacement of the Main Library with a new "central" library.

The following report serves as an update to that original Facilities Master Plan and evaluates the status of OPL buildings in light of the passage of time and continued population growth in Douglas County. The study is somewhat limited in scope. Funding was not available for architectural, engineering, real estate assessments, or even the updating of the detailed branch-level profiles. Consequently, this study is not nearly as comprehensive as the 2010 effort; however, what this study *does* do is review the findings, assumptions, and recommendations of the 2010 report in an effort to determine whether those findings, assumptions, and recommendations remain valid. The new report factors in population growth, facility changes and improvements that have taken in the intervening years, as well as recent trends in public library service delivery. Finally, the new study offers a revised set of recommendations.

POPULATION AS A MAJOR CRITERIA FOR LIBRARY PLANNING

As the term “public library” implies, the purpose of public libraries is to serve people. Therefore, the number of people potentially served by a facility (or the service population) is the one of the most important criteria used in library planning. For purposes of both the 2010 study and the current study, the library service population was/is presumed to be the population of Douglas County, Nebraska excluding the City of Ralston, which maintains its own independent public library.

When work on the 2010 ***Omaha Public Library Facilities Master Plan*** was being conducted, the collection of data for the 2010 United States Census had recently been completed but the results of that Census were not yet available. Consequently, sources other than the already dated 2000 U.S. Census were used for planning purposes. Population and population projection data drawn from the Omaha-Council Bluffs Metropolitan Area Planning Agency and the University of Nebraska's Bureau of Business Research were used in the 2010 study.

Himmel & Wilson used a baseline service design population of 510,000 people for the earlier study. The subsequent release of 2010 U.S. Census data reported the Douglas County population at 517,110 and the City of Ralston's population at 5,943. This means that the actual service population for OPL at the time of the earlier study was 511,167 (517,110 – 5,943). Obviously, the 510,000 service population estimate that was used was extremely accurate.

However, the 2010 study also used a very conservative 2030 projected service population of 560,000 for long-range planning purposes. It is now clear that population growth in Douglas County will far exceed this projection. The U.S. Census Bureau's July 2016 population estimate for the County is already 554,995 and the Center for Public Affairs Research University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) now projects Douglas County's 2030 population at 625,173. Since a twenty-year time-horizon is typically used for public library planning purposes, it also makes some sense to consider population projections for 2040 as we approach the year 2020. The Center for Public Affairs Research at UNO predicts that Douglas County's population will continue to grow at a brisk pace and that it will reach 680,008 by 2040. Therefore, estimated service populations of 625,173 and 680,008 will be used in this study to project space needs for 2030 and 2040 respectively.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Omaha Public Library currently provides services from the same twelve library facilities that existed when the 2010 study was conducted. The largest of these facilities, by a large margin, is the 122,490 Square Foot (SF) W. Dale Clark Main Library. The Main Library, which is located in the heart of the downtown area, was opened 41 years ago (1976). The W. Dale Clark Library accounts for over forty percent (40.1%) of OPL's overall square footage of approximately 305,252 SF.

The only increase in library space that has taken place since the 2010 study was conducted is a relatively modest addition to the Florence Library that was completed in 2011. In fact, the addition to the Florence building had already been planned at the time of the earlier study and was factored into calculations performed at that time.

The newest OPL facilities are the South Omaha Branch (2008) and the Saddlebrook Branch (2009). The oldest of the OPL buildings is the original portion of the Benson Branch Library (1946). In 1998, the 1946 portion of the Benson Library was completely renovated and an addition was constructed that more than tripled that library's size. The Willa Cather Branch (1956) is the oldest facility that has not been enlarged or substantially renovated. The Millard Library, originally built in 1981 was renovated at the time of its expansion in 1999, and likewise, the Charles B. Washington Library was completely renovated when it was expanded in 2006.

If the date of major expansions that included complete renovations of existing facilities are used to determine an "effective" age of each building, the following picture emerges:

1950s	1 Facility (Willa Cather)
1960s	1 Facility (Swanson)
1970s	2 Facilities (Main, Sorensen)
1980s	1 Facility (Abrahams)
1990s	3 Facilities (Benson, Elkhorn, Millard)
2000s	3 Facilities (Saddlebrook, South Omaha, Washington)
2010s	1 Facility (Florence)

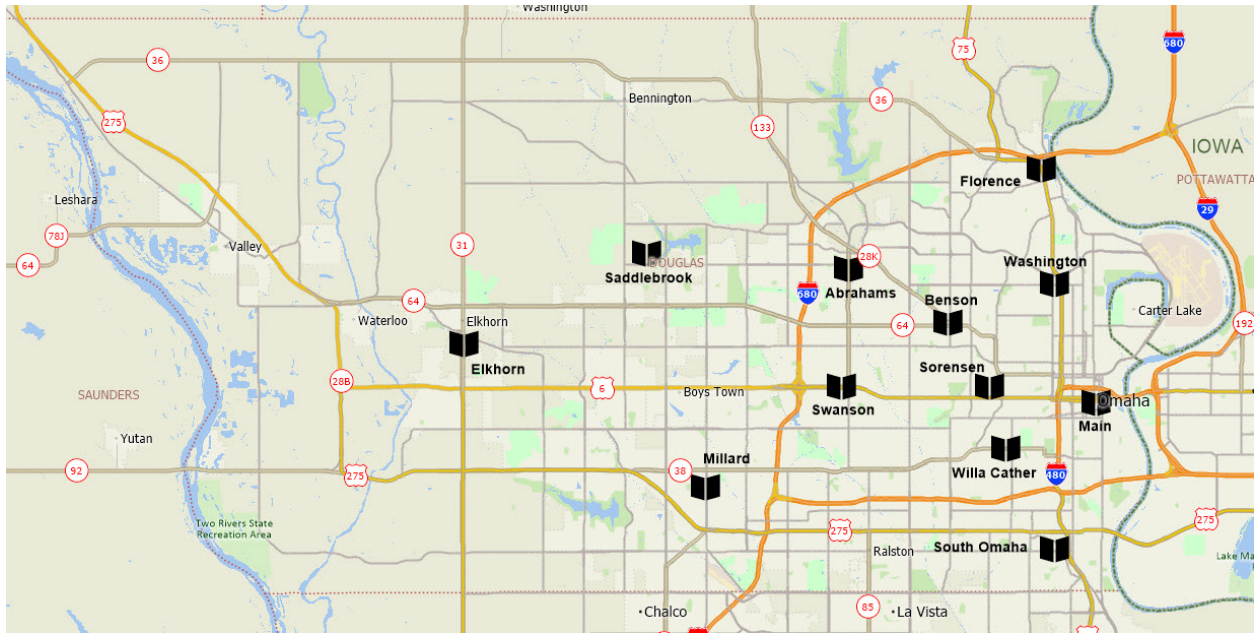
It should also be noted that the Main Library was renovated in 1995 and that the Sorensen Library was extensively renovated in 2009. The Swanson Library and the Abrahams Library were renovated in 2010 and 2011 respectively. The Swanson renovations were somewhat less extensive than those performed at Abrahams.

Table 1 shown below summarizes some of the basic data about the OPL facilities.

	Square Footage	Year Built	Year Last Expanded	Year Last Major Physical Renovation
Abrahams (Milton R. Abrahams)	20,450	1988	None	2011
Benson	20,300	1946	1998	1998
Elkhorn (Bess Johnson)	7,893	1996	None	None
Florence	7,412	1976	2011	2011
Main Library (W. Dale Clark)	122,490	1976	None	1995
Millard	31,360	1981	1999	1999
Saddlebrook	14,155	2009	None	None
Sorensen (A.V. Sorensen)	6,495	1976	2009	2009
South Omaha	21,050	2008	None	None
Swanson (W. Clarke Swanson)	25,495	1966	None	2010
Washington (Charles B. Washington)	16,675	1972	2006	2006
Willa Cather	11,477	1956	None	None
	305,252			

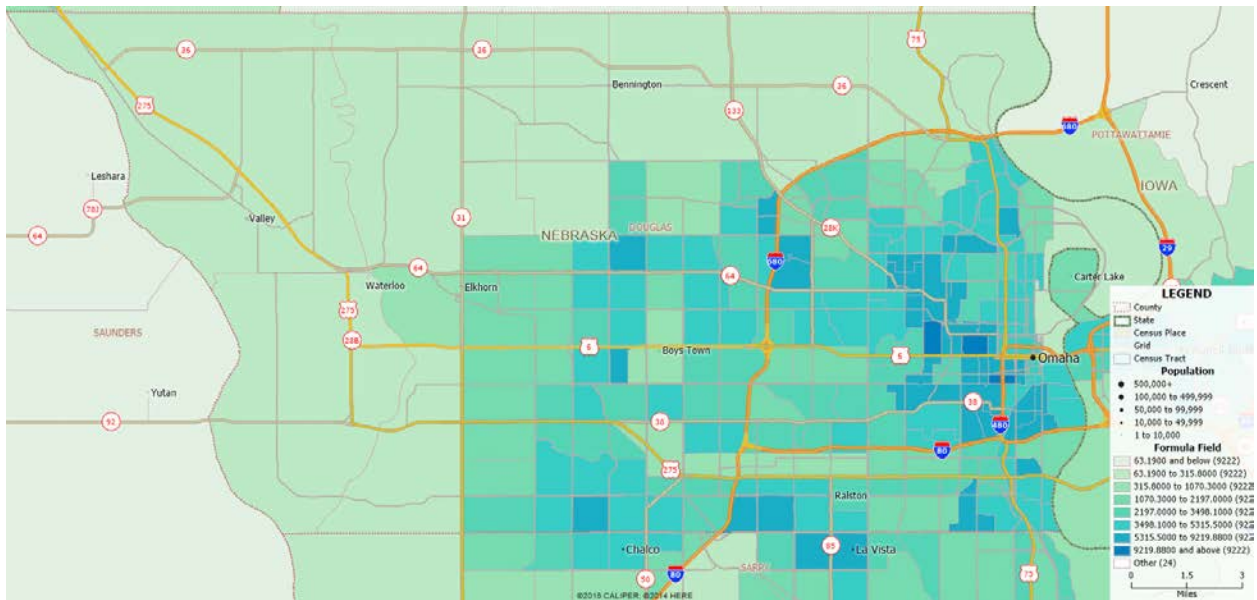
Table 1
Omaha Public Library Facilities

Map 1 on the following page displays the location of OPL’s existing libraries. Two realities are obvious from a cursory glance at the map. First, the majority of the library facilities are located at the eastern end of Douglas County. Second, the density of libraries is considerably greater in the eastern end of the County than in the western reaches of the County. It is not at all surprising that OPL’s existing facilities are heavily skewed toward the east. The history of OPL’s origins as a municipal library, the location of earlier boundaries of the City of Omaha, and the path of County population growth over time all serve to explain the existing distribution of buildings. Simply put, libraries were originally built within the City boundaries and in close proximity to where the majority of people lived when those libraries were being erected.



Map 1
Existing Library Locations

However, as the following population density map illustrates, the distribution of population of Douglas County has become more evenly distributed than it was in the past and the center of population has moved considerably west of the downtown area.



Map 2
Population Density by Census Tract

The population growth that has already occurred and the future westward expansion that is predicted, have created, and will continue to create, significant service inequities if the current number and distribution of library facilities is maintained indefinitely.

KEY QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED

The purpose of updating the 2010 library facilities master plan is to provide unbiased information that can be used to inform decisions related to physical facilities that are confronting and will confront the Omaha Public Library Administration, Board of Trustees, and the elected officials charged with the responsibility of ensuring that public funds are expended in a manner that maximizes the impact of every taxpayer dollar spent on library services.

The two key questions to be addressed are:

1. How well are the existing Omaha Public Library facilities meeting the needs of Omaha/Douglas County residents, and,
2. what public library facilities will be required over the next 20 years (23 years if the 2040 time-horizon target is applied) to continue to effectively meet public library service needs?

NEED FOR BRICKS AND MORTAR FACILITIES

The demise of “bricks and mortar” public library facilities has been predicted since the proliferation of personal computers began in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Many articles that appeared in news magazines (some of which no longer exist) in the 1980s and 1990s went so far as to predict that libraries would be obsolete by the year 2000. Obviously, these predictions did not pan out. However, the question of the long-term viability of libraries is valid and relevant to the study at hand.

The reasoning offered by those who have predicted the death of public libraries has usually been that people will no longer need or want print books because “everything will be available online.” In fact, the printed book has proven to be very resilient and its continued popularity suggests that print-on-paper will continue to command a significant audience alongside of e-books in much the same way that radio continued to thrive after television emerged.

Radio's longevity has been, at least in part, due to the fact that it adjusted its content to maintain and build its audience. Radio dramas and comedies moved to TV while music, news, and sports became the mainstays of radio broadcasting. In a similar way, some types of print materials (reference books for example) have largely been replaced by their electronic/virtual counterparts. Public libraries are certain to see declines in the circulation of physical audiobooks, music CDs and DVDs as these types of content continue to move in the direction of downloading and streaming. However, the demand for traditional hard-copy fiction, non-fiction and children's books remains very strong.

Although a steep climb in the use of book length e-books occurred when the price-point of e-readers such as the Kindle first broke the \$200 mark, this trend has leveled off and e-book use has receded modestly in the last few years. Publishers report that approximately seventy percent (70%) of the sales of book-length materials are sales of hard-copy. Furthermore, over the last two years, e-book sales have actually declined while the sale of print books has increased. In short (and to paraphrase a quote sometimes attributed to Mark Twain), "The reports of *the death of public libraries* are greatly exaggerated." There is little doubt that we will need bricks and mortar public libraries in the year 2040 and that these libraries will contain sizeable collections of print materials.

In the next section of this report, the reader will find that the consultants have applied a "rule-of-thumb" measure of .75 square feet per capita to library needs. In doing so, trends in anticipated reductions in the sizes of some specific collections such as reference materials and non-print/media items have already been factored in.

PUBLIC LIBRARY SPACE STANDARDS

Library planners are often asked "how much public library space is appropriate for our community?" It is difficult to offer a precise answer to this question because space needs are impacted by multiple factors. The range of services offered by the library or libraries, local conditions including the quality of and public access to libraries in educational institutions, the availability of other community meeting spaces, the history of library services in an area and a host of other issues can affect the answer to a significant degree.

Nevertheless, some "rules-of-thumb" *are* available and, because they offer a good starting point for discussion, are frequently used.

A Brief History of Space Needs Standards

For much of the 20th century, standards and guidelines issued by professional organizations and state library agencies suggested that a minimum of approximately 0.5 square feet (SF) of public library space should be provided per capita. For example, the application of this standard to a community with a population of 20,000 would yield a recommended public library of approximately 10,000 square feet (20,000 population X 0.5 SF/capita = 10,000 SF).

This 0.5 SF/capita rule-of-thumb began to change in the late 1980s and 1990s as libraries added computer workstations, larger collections of non-print media (e.g., music on CD, audiobooks and videos), more extensive meeting facilities and more amenities such as cafes, friends of the library bookstores, interactive "discovery" areas for pre-school children and larger areas for teens. The rules-of-thumb and/or standards frequently applied first increased to 0.6 SF per capita, then to 0.75 SF/capita and, by the year 2000, most library planners were suggesting a ratio of one square foot per capita or greater.

During this period of time, many states that had at one time promulgated the 0.5 SF/capita standard abandoned the quantitative approach entirely in favor of a "bottom-up" calculation of space needs based on service offerings. In other places, typically in states offering grants to local governments for library construction, library agencies embraced higher per capita standards. For example, the Texas State Library and Archives applied a 0.6 SF/capita guideline as a minimum requisite and the State of Delaware required applicants for state aid for the construction of library buildings to meet or exceed a 0.75 SF/capita standard.

As noted above, many library planners (including Himmel & Wilson) adopted standards higher than the 0.75 SF/capita level in the early 2000s; however, many have now returned to the 0.75 SF/capita level as representing a compromise that accounts for some future reduction in collection sizes, some reduction in the amount of space dedicated to wired computer workstations (in favor of spaces to use portable/hand-held devices using Wi-Fi), and increases in demands for collaborative, group study, and community meeting spaces. The 0.75 SF/capita standard was used as a general guideline in the 2010 study and it is applied in this study as well.

The Application of Space Needs Standards in Omaha in the Past

Himmel & Wilson was not the first to employ a 0.75 SF/capita criterion to estimate public library space needs in Omaha. The "Facility Element" of the City of Omaha's Master Plan, which was first developed in 1997, used an overall benchmark of 0.75 SF/capita in assessing library space needs. Reflecting the upward trend in square feet per capita that was taking place at that time, it was noted at that time that this was "slightly under, but close to, national standards."

In 1997, the Omaha Public Library system was composed of ten facilities. These buildings totaled approximately 218,000 SF in size. At that time, more than half of total library space (57%) was accounted for by the W. Dale Clark (Main) Library. At the time, Omaha fell well below the 0.75 benchmark that was suggested. If the 2000 Census population of 463,585 for Douglas County is applied; the library space/population ratio would have been .47 SF/capita. However, OPL was serving less of Douglas County in 1997 (e.g., Elkhorn was not a part of the City at the time), so the situation was not quite as dire as the .47 SF/capita measure would suggest. The effective ratio at the time was very close to .50 SF/capita.

To address the space deficit identified in the 1997 study, the City's Master Plan called for the addition of nearly 150,000 SF of additional space (including additions to existing buildings, replacements for existing buildings and new facilities). This represented an increase of more than sixty-eight percent (68.7%) over the space available for public library purposes at the time that the 1997 plan was released.

The City's 1997 "Public Facilities Element" report looked at the library system's total space needs in two categories: neighborhood library service space and reference service space. Neighborhood library space was generally calculated at 0.55 SF/capita (the two facilities co-located in community centers, Florence and Sorensen, were calculated at 0.41 SF per person). Reference space was calculated at 0.34 SF per capita; however, it was rightly assumed that the W. Dale Clark (Main) Library would provide reference services to an extended area. The blended target reached by adding neighborhood needs and reference needs (with the adjustment for the Clark Library) was the 0.75 SF/capita.

In the years that elapsed between 1997 when the City Master Plan estimated library space needs and 2010, the Omaha Public Library added approximately 87,000 SF of library space, or a little less than sixty percent (58%) of what was envisioned in 1997. This increase included the expansion of the Benson,

Millard, Sorensen and Washington libraries, the replacement of the South Omaha Branch with the South Omaha/Metropolitan Community College joint-use library facility, the addition of the Saddlebrook joint school/public library facility, and the acquisition of the Bess Johnson Elkhorn Library as part of the annexation of Elkhorn to the City of Omaha.

The Current Situation

Table 2 below presents some basic data regarding each of OPL’s existing facilities.

	Square Footage	Year Built	Year Last Expanded	Year Last Major Physical Renovation
Abrahams (Milton R. Abrahams)	20,450	1988	None	2011
Benson	20,300	1946	1998	1998
Elkhorn (Bess Johnson)	7,893	1996	None	None
Florence	7,412	1976	2011	2011
Main Library (W. Dale Clark)	122,490	1976	None	1995
Millard	31,360	1981	1999	1999
Saddlebrook	14,155	2009	None	None
Sorensen (A.V. Sorensen)	6,495	1976	2009	2009
South Omaha	21,050	2008	None	None
Swanson (W. Clarke Swanson)	25,495	1966	None	2010
Washington (Charles B. Washington)	16,675	1972	2006	2006
Willa Cather	11,477	1956	None	None
	305,252			

Table 2
Basic Branch Data

Since the “building boom” that occurred between 1998 and 2009, the only space added to OPL’s physical plant has been a modest addition (less than 2,000 SF) to the Florence Library. Taken together, all of the additional space constructed between 1998 and 2009 represents considerable improvement from the situation that existed in 1997; however, it must also be noted that

these changes occurred during a period of explosive population growth. Given the lack of new facility development and/or expansion of facilities since the 2010-2011 Florence project concluded and Douglas County’s significant ongoing population growth, OPL is rapidly losing the library “space race.”

As Table 2 on the previous page shows, the Omaha Public Library offers services from 12 library facilities that total approximately 305,252 Gross Square Feet (GSF) of space. Of this space, 122,490 GSF (or 40.1%) is located at the W. Dale Clark (Main) Library. Following is an accounting of the application of the 0.75 SF/capita standard based on current and projected population growth as calculated by the Center for Public Affairs Research University of Nebraska at Omaha.

	Douglas County Population	0.75 SF/capita	Current Square Footage	Deficit in Square Feet	SF/capita (Without Adding New Space)
2010	517,110	387,833	305,252	82,581	0.59
2016	544,083	408,062	305,252	102,810	0.56
2020	571,311	428,483	305,252	123,231	0.53
2025	598,220	448,665	305,252	143,413	0.51
2030	625,173	468,880	305,252	163,628	0.49
2035	652,243	489,182	305,252	183,930	0.47
2040	680,008	510,006	305,252	204,754	0.45

Table 3
Estimated Overall Library Space Needs and Deficits

As was already stated, OPL’s existing physical plant consists of approximately 305,252 GSF. This translates into approximately 0.59 SF/capita. Based on national norms, the consultants would characterize this as “marginally adequate.” In our professional estimation, a library system such as Omaha’s crosses the line between marginal adequacy and inadequacy when it drops below 0.50 SF/capita. Himmel & Wilson frequently refers to this 0.50 SF/capita benchmark as the “West Virginia standard.” This is because the State of West Virginia, which is not typically acclaimed for the quality of its library facilities, has traditionally used the 0.50 mark as the minimum recommended facility size. Using the population estimates above, OPL will, as a whole, cross into “West Virginia” territory between 2025 and 2030 if no action is taken.

Distribution of Facilities

Table 4 provides an indication of the percentage of OPL's total physical plant is represented by each of the branch facilities.

Library	Approximate Square Footage	Percentage of Physical Plant
Abrahams	20,450	6.7%
Benson	20,300	6.7%
Cather	11,477	3.8%
Elkhorn	7,893	2.6%
Florence	7,412	2.4%
Main	122,490	40.1%
Millard	31,360	10.3%
Saddlebrook	14,155	4.6%
Sorensen	6,495	2.1%
South Omaha	21,050	6.9%
Swanson	25,495	8.4%
Washington	16,675	5.5%
	305,252	100.0%

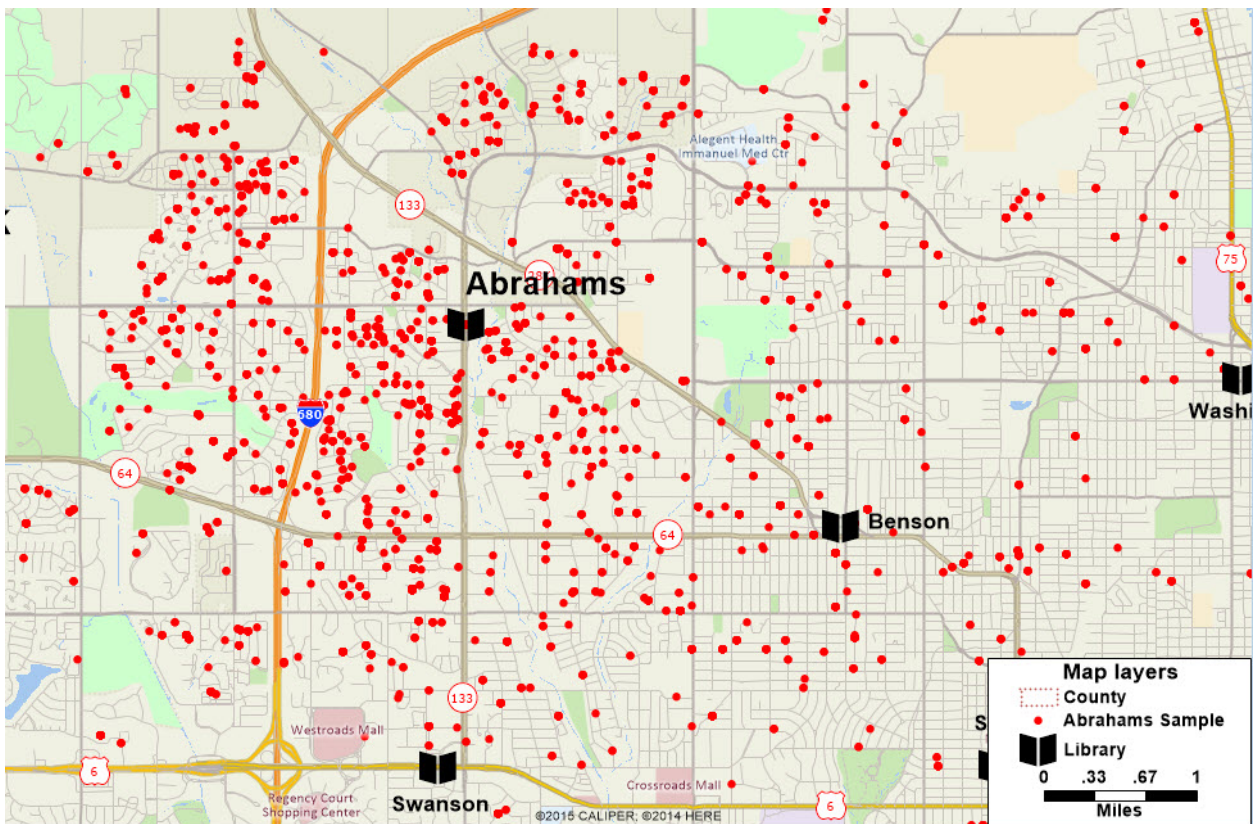
Table 4
Percentage of Total Physical Plant by Branch

Other Important Considerations

As was noted earlier, the 0.75 SF/capita standard is a “blended” average. That is, it presumes that differences in a specific building’s program of service and neighborhood characteristics may result in some libraries being larger and some being smaller than the 0.75 SF/capita average. Furthermore, realities of physical geography such as waterways and manmade barriers such as railroad corridors and major highways can significantly impact effective service areas.

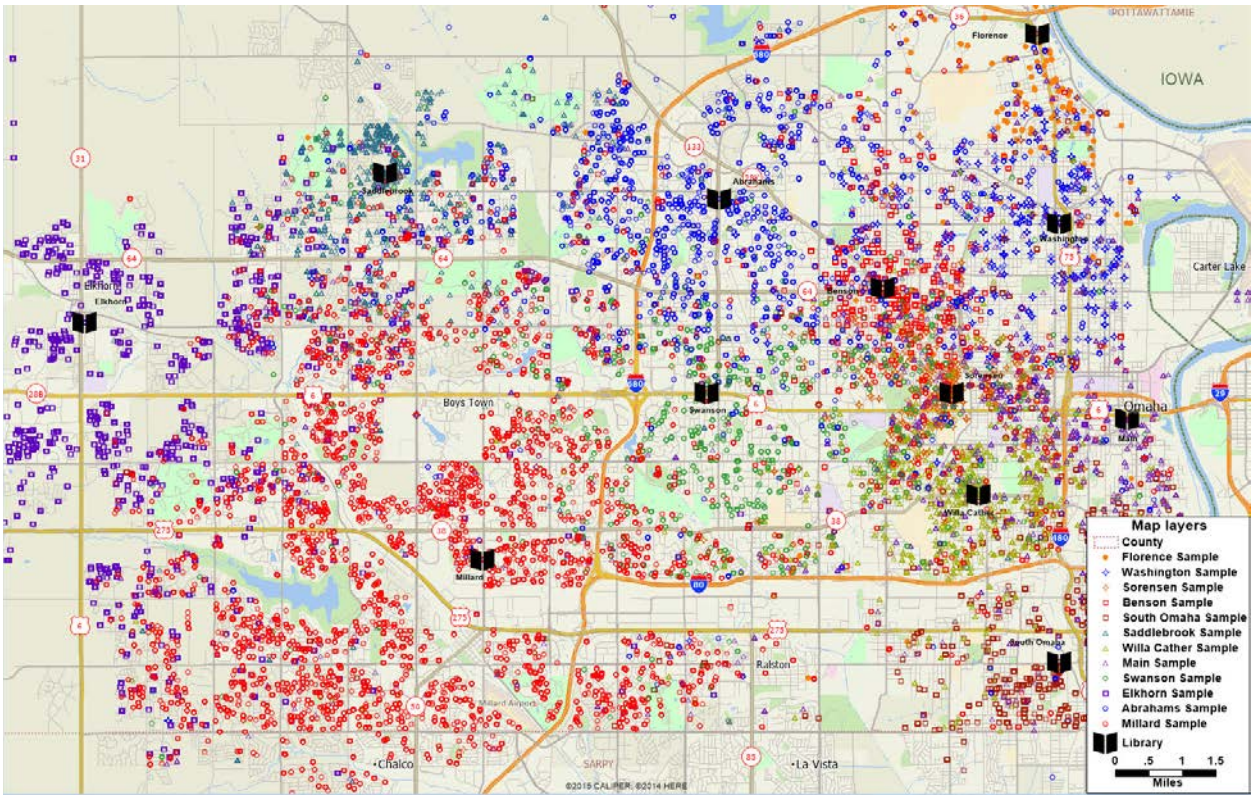
Mapping of Service Areas

To gain insight into these vagaries, Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping of a sample of actual library usage was conducted as part of the current study. Several different approaches were then taken to determine the populations currently served by OPL's existing branches. We will refer to one approach as the "INCLUSIVE Service Area Population" method and the second as the "EFFECTIVE Service Area Population" method. Both methods were based on data representing a one-month sample of actual library circulation usage. Addresses representing households showing some activity from each specific branch were run through a geo-coding process to create electronic pin-maps. An example of one of these maps is shown below.



Map 3
Sample of Abrahams Library Usage

By overlaying individual usage maps, the consultants were able to gain a better understanding of the interaction of usage between and among library branches. Map 4 on the following page shows the interaction between and among all OPL locations.

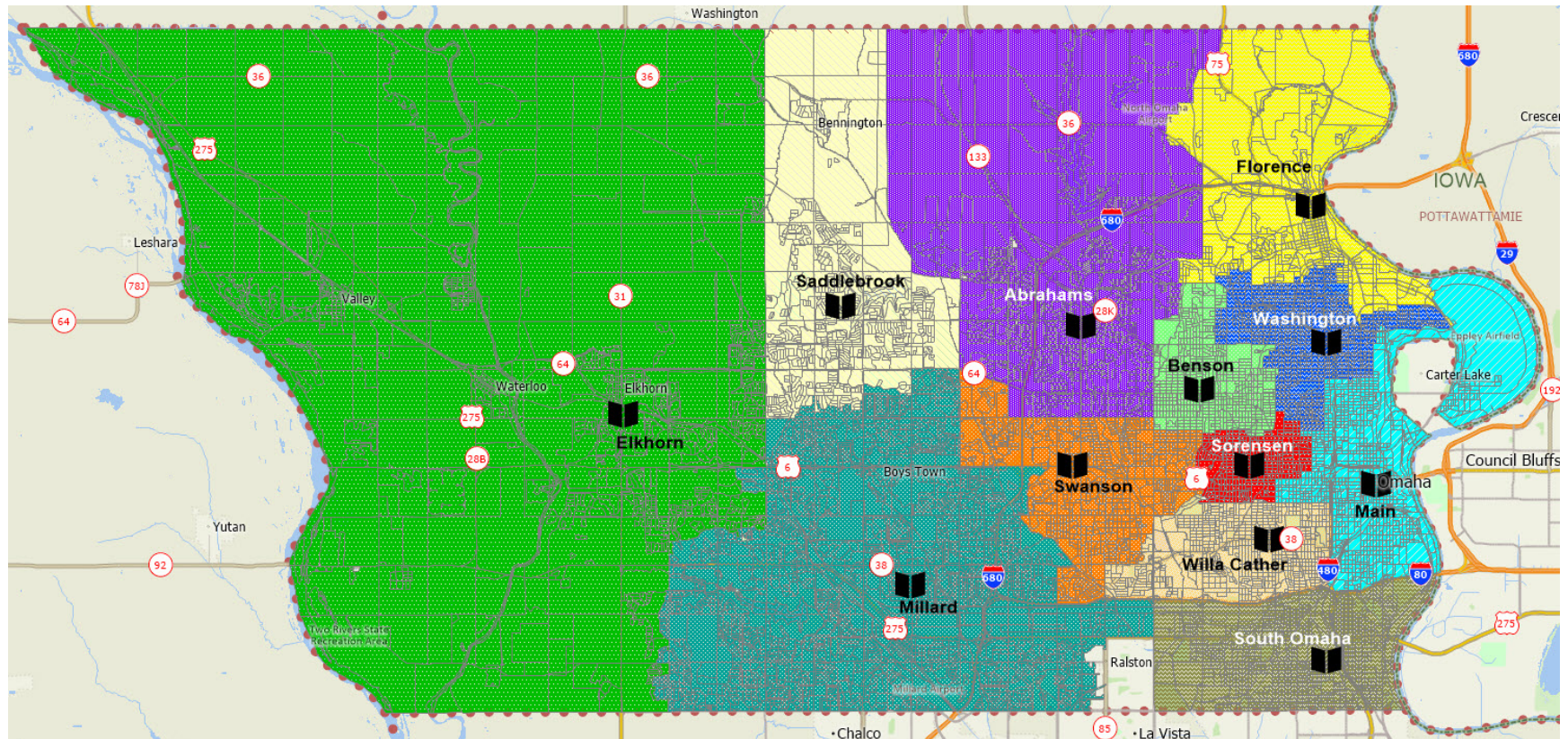


Map 4
Omaha Public Library Branch Use Interaction Map

Both the INCLUSIVE and EFFECTIVE methods employed were based on an analysis of the interaction of usage for a specific branch. For example, the analysis of the service area for the A.V. Sorensen Library considered the usage of that branch as it related to the usage of the Benson and Willa Cather libraries.

The INCLUSIVE Service Area Population method assumes that all areas of the County (with the exception of Ralston) are being served to some extent by existing libraries since all residents have legal access to all twelve libraries. The Inclusive method assigns service areas based on the prevalence of usage on the Census Block level. Areas with no use are assigned to the library that appears to make the greatest sense. For example, all territory east of the Elkhorn Library is assigned to Elkhorn since no other libraries are located in that area. Areas immediately to the north of the Saddlebrook Branch Library are assigned to Saddlebrook. The same process is then used with all libraries to achieve “wall-to-wall” service areas. The map on the following page displays the service areas that were derived from this process. The table on the page following the map (Table 5) shows how these service areas translate into square feet per capita at the branch level.

Map 5
Omaha Public Library INCLUSIVE Branch Service Areas 2017



It should be noted that the service populations reported in Table 5 below are based on 2010 Census Block populations and therefore understate the actual number of people served in growing areas. This is particularly true in the western portion of the County. In short, the situation is even worse than the table indicates for libraries such as Elkhorn, Millard, and Saddlebrook.

Library	Approximate Square Footage	Estimated Service Population (Based on 2010 Census Data)	Estimated SF/capita
Abrahams	20,450	51,414	0.40
Benson	20,300	30,156	0.67
Cather	11,477	37,780	0.30
Elkhorn	7,893	35,053	0.23
Florence	7,412	14,113	0.53
Main	122,490	42,529	2.88
Millard	31,360	139,603	0.22
Saddlebrook	14,155	36,619	0.39
Sorensen	6,495	18,811	0.35
South Omaha	21,050	38,963	0.54
Swanson	25,495	35,908	0.71
Washington	16,675	29,077	0.57

Table 5
Branch Level Square Feet per Capita Using INCLUSIVE Approach

It was mentioned earlier that OPL as a whole will cross into “West Virginia” territory (less than 0.50 SF/capita) in regard to square feet per capita between 2025 and 2030 if no action is taken. As you can see from the highlighted libraries in the table above, half of Omaha Public Library’s individual facilities already achieve this dubious distinction even when 2010 population data is applied.

The Inclusive approach, while useful in visualizing the big picture, masks the fact that some County residents have less than convenient access to library services. To gain a better sense of service gaps, Himmel & Wilson also developed “EFFECTIVE” Service Area Populations for each library. Rather than assigning all areas of the County to a library, the Effective Service Area

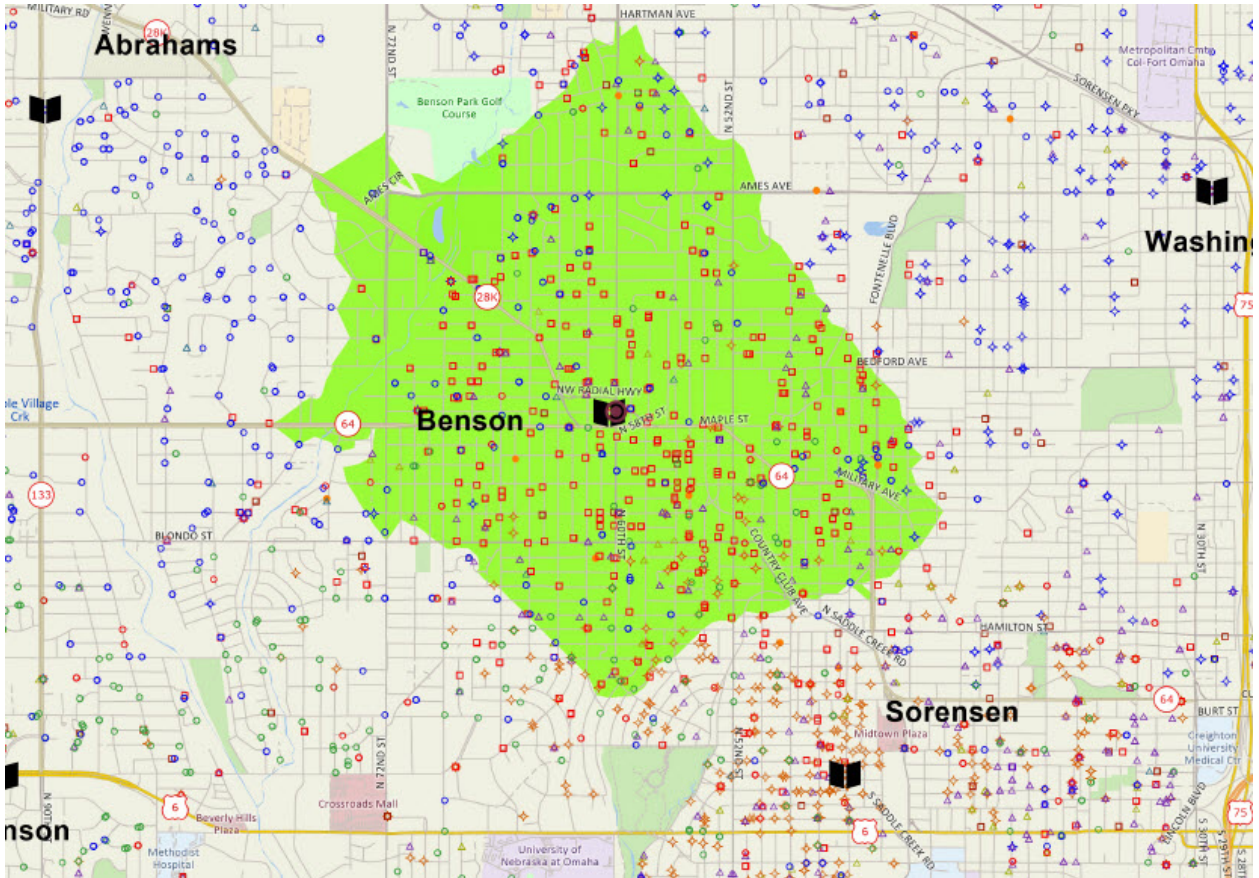
approach uses drive-times from libraries to help identify underserved areas. The use of drive-times begins to recognize the geographic and man-made barriers to use that were mentioned previously. For example, usage of the Florence Library from areas east of that facility is obviously limited by the proximity of the Missouri River and the legal ramifications of a state boundary.

While drive-time populations provide a good indication of the number of people with convenient access to library services, this method also has a flaw in that some people are counted more than once due to overlaps in service areas. This situation is particularly prevalent in the eastern portion of the City/County where libraries are located more closely together.

At this juncture, it is important to point out that it is quite appropriate to have neighborhood branches in urban areas located in closer proximity to each other than they are in outlying areas. This is especially true in urban areas with large numbers of low-income households. Transportation availability (often reflected in the number of vehicles available in a household) significantly limits the mobility of individuals. Regional branch libraries serving suburban areas can often effectively service residents within a six-minute drive-time. However, a six-minute drive-time is both meaningless and a real obstacle for an individual in the inner city who must walk to the library because they don't have a vehicle or come from a household in which a single vehicle is used primarily to go to and from a work site.

In applying the Effective Service Area methodology, the length of the drive-time used was determined based on the general distribution of active households derived from the GIS maps based on a sample of actual use. Consequently, longer drive-times (that generate larger areas of coverage) are used for some libraries and shorter drive-times (that generate smaller areas of coverage) are used for other branches.

Map 6 on the next page shows a typical drive-time map. Drive times are set based on an effort to capture approximately 80 – 85% of a given branch's total usage. Based on this approach, the Benson Library was assigned a 3-minute drive-time.



Map 6
Benson Library 3-Minute Drive-Time

Table 6 on the next page indicates the drive-time applied and the resulting estimated 2015 Effective Service Area Populations that were determined for each of the branches using the “EFFECTIVE Service Area Population” method. It should be noted that six-minutes has been adopted as a maximum recommended drive-time even though the Millard Library currently serves many people from up to nine-minutes away. It is interesting to note that the 1997 City Master Plan used distances rather than drive-times and recommended two miles as the reasonable distance for libraries in the urban core and a five and one-half mile maximum travel distance. The drive-time approach has distinct advantages since it factors in physical barriers such as major highways and railroad tracks. However, the concept and effective distances employed are quite similar.

Library	Approximate Square Footage	Effective Drive-Time Area	Estimated 2015 Population within Drive-Time Area	Estimated SF/capita
Abrahams	20,450	5 minutes	55,412	0.37
Benson	20,300	3 minutes	25,585	0.79
Cather	11,477	3 minutes	25,270	0.45
Elkhorn	7,893	6 minutes	18,509	0.43
Florence	7,412	4 minutes	11,398	0.65
Main	122,490	3 minutes	13,555	9.04
Millard	31,360	6/9 minutes*	72,193/154,458	0.43/0.20
Saddlebrook	14,155	3 minutes	12,917	1.10
Sorensen	6,495	2 minutes	10,108	0.64
South Omaha	21,050	5 minutes	48,359	0.44
Swanson	25,495	4 minutes	27,581	0.92
Washington	16,675	4 minutes	38,131	0.44

Table 6
Branch Level Square Feet per Capita Using EFFECTIVE Approach

Although this method also identifies one-half of OPL’s libraries as falling below the “West Virginia” standard, the mix of libraries is slightly different. The Abrahams, Cather, Elkhorn, and Millard libraries are identified as sub-standard on both lists; however, the Saddlebrook and Sorensen libraries are replaced by the South Omaha and Washington libraries on the Effective Service Area list.

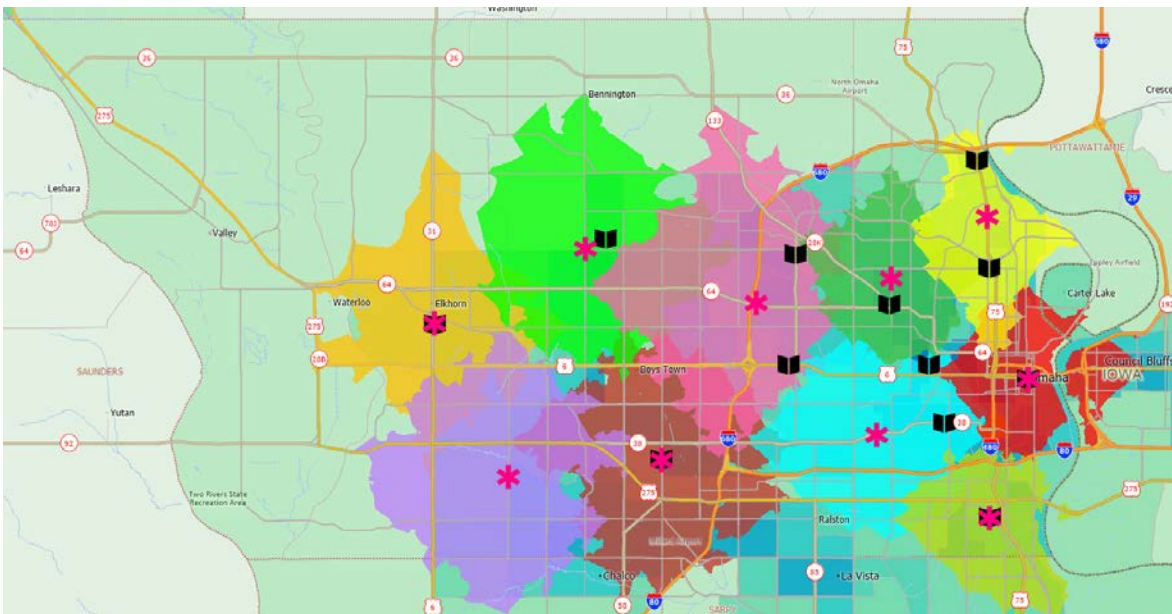
The Saddlebrook Library offers a clear explanation of why these approaches generate different results. The Saddlebrook Library is effectively serving 12,917 people within a 3 minute drive-time of that library facility; however, the expectation under the Inclusive method is that it is serving 36,619 people. The situation for the Millard Library is dire under both approaches. A strong case can be made that the Millard Library is inadequate to serve the 72,193 people who live within a six-minute drive-time of that facility. When it is considered that the library is acting as the primary library for 154,458 people (approximately 28% of the total Douglas County population), the SF/capita drops off to 0.20; which is woefully inadequate.

A “CLEAN-SLATE” MODEL

Although it is impractical to consider wiping the slate clean and starting over again with new libraries, building a scenario based on the question “What would we do if we were starting from scratch?” is often instructive.

Consequently, Himmel & Wilson produced a map in an effort to ascertain what service areas might look like if libraries were “ideally” located from a population distribution point of view. Map 7 identifies ideal library locations using red stars. The Clean-Slate scenario presumes that it would be impractical to build libraries in areas that are sparsely populated. The consultants found that a total of ten library locations could theoretically meet the needs of the vast majority of Douglas County residents to an adequate extent.

For purposes of this exercise, it was presumed that drive-times needed to be shorter in the urban core of the City where the number of automobiles per household tends to be lower and that drive-times could be longer in areas that are more “suburban” in nature and in which automobile ownership per household tends to be higher. Map 7 shows that four existing libraries (libraries are marked with book symbols) are reasonably well located to fulfill this scenario. They are Elkhorn, Main, Millard, and South Omaha. The Benson and Saddlebrook branches are close to ideal locations; however, Saddlebrook’s location deep within a neighborhood and its co-location in a school makes it a poor candidate for expansion on the existing site.



Map 7
Ten-Library Clean-Slate Scenario

To some extent, the Clean-Slate model also ignores neighborhood history and dynamics. For example, the consultants do not believe that a combined Florence and Washington facility such as the one indicated on the map by a red star between the two areas would likely particularly effective in meeting the needs of either neighborhood very well.

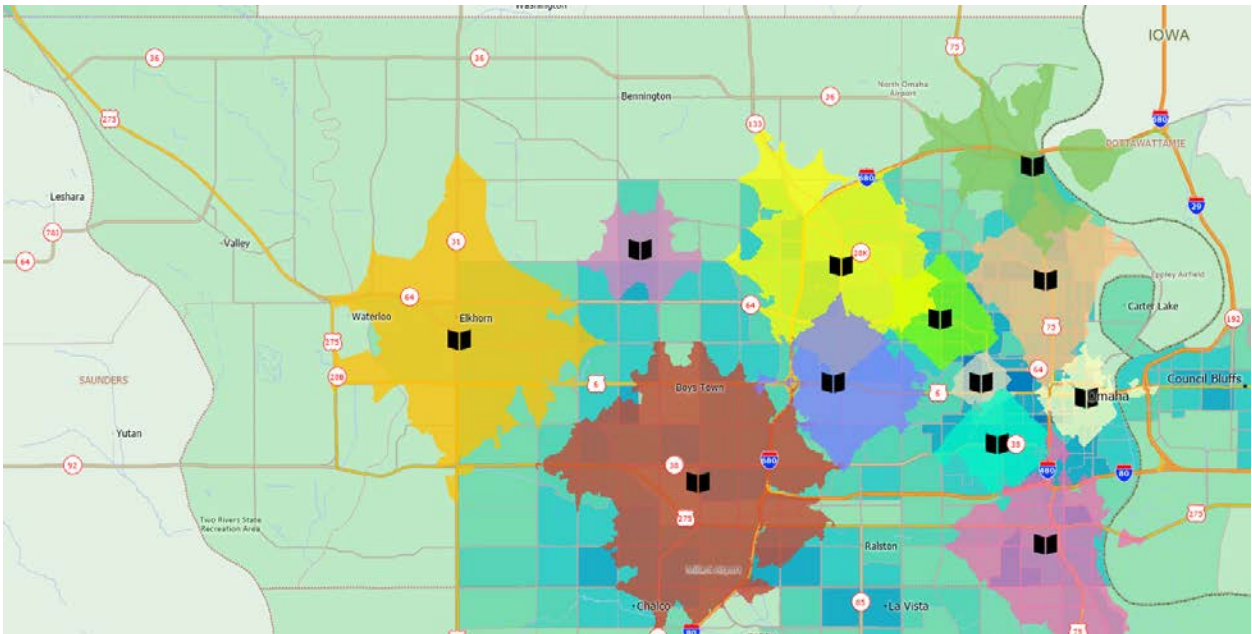
However, the Clean-Slate exercise does provide a few insights. First, it confirms that the physical locations of the Elkhorn, Main, Millard, and South Omaha libraries are reasonably good. Given that the Elkhorn and Millard libraries are well located, the exercise suggests a location for a new library designed to serve areas that have experienced high growth that are west of Millard and southeast of Elkhorn.

The Clean-Slate scenario also suggests that a larger library with a greater reach in drive-time located on a major artery near the existing Saddlebrook Branch could fill an important gap. Finally, it suggests that any replacement for the current Willa Cather Library would achieve greater coverage if it was located west of its current site.

DRIVE-TIMES AND POPULATION DENSITY

Overlaying reasonable library drive-times for current locations on top of a population density map can be useful in creating a better understanding of existing service gaps. Map 8 employs the drive-times that were presented in Table 6 on page 19. You will recall that the drive-times selected represented an attempt to find the drive-time that would capture 80% - 85% of a branch's total usage.

Light green areas shown on Map 8 are areas with relatively sparse population; areas shown in darker shades on a green-blue scale indicate areas with higher population densities. Several things are very apparent from this map. First, if a six-minute drive-time is applied as a maximum recommended distance from a branch, a large section of the County with considerable population emerges west of the Millard Library and southeast of the Elkhorn Library. The inadequacy of the Saddlebrook Library to serve as more than a neighborhood branch also becomes clear. Another underserved area presents itself west of the Willa Cather Library and southeast of the Swanson Library.



Map 8
Drive-Times and Population Density

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Two basic questions were raised at the beginning of this report. They are:

1. How well are the existing Omaha Public Library facilities meeting the needs of Omaha/Douglas County residents, and,
2. what public library facilities will be required over the next 20 years (23 years if the 2040 time-horizon target is applied) to continue to effectively meet public library service needs?

The findings and recommendations that follow directly address these questions. In addition, the findings and recommendations also shed some light on several other questions that arise from the those listed above. Readers should consider the implications of this second tier of questions because they represent some of the challenges that OPL will face as they attempt to implement the recommendations.

Questions That Need to Be Considered

- Is it more important to address the needs in unserved areas than to bring existing libraries up to contemporary standards? Is it possible to do both?
- Which, if any, libraries should be expanded?
- Which, if any, should be replaced?
- Are new facilities needed? If so, approximately where should these facilities be located?
- Are there any new service models that might enable the Library to offer high- quality service from smaller facilities?
- What is the best approach to maximize the excess capacity of space at the Clark (Main) Library?

Findings

- The Omaha Public Library has a serious deficit of public library space. Past growth in the central portion of the City/County and current/anticipated growth in the central and western sections of Douglas County result in underserved areas.
- Even if the conservative 0.75 SF/capita guideline is applied, the Omaha Public Library will need approximately 163,628 GSF of additional public library space by 2030 (based on an estimated population of 625,173) and approximately 204,754 GSF of additional public library space by the year 2040 (based on an estimated population of 680,008).
- The overall quality and condition of existing facilities is good. The Millard and Abrahams facilities are excellent; several of the other branches (e.g., Washington, Benson) are very good.
- Facilities remodeled over the last decade have incorporated many of the positive characteristics observed in the best public library facilities in the nation. (A major exception to this observation is that Radio-Frequency Identification [RFID] technologies for checkout, self-check security and materials handling have not been implemented to date.)
- The W. Dale Clark (Main) Library is dated and was designed at a time when service philosophies and practice (especially in the area of

reference service) were quite different. The facility is inefficient and under-utilized. The building, opened in 1976, incorporated a highly departmentalized design that was popular in the 1960s and 1970s. Unfortunately, this type of design has proven to be very costly to operate in that it involves a large number of service desks all of which require separate staffing to provide adequate service. The consultants believe that a rethinking/redesign of service delivery needs to be considered on the first floor in the short-term and that replacement of the Main Library should be seriously considered as part of a phased implementation of this updated Plan.

- The Benson Library is attractive and well used. However, lighting is poor in most areas of the facility and should be addressed in future capital budgets. Carpeting is also in need of replacement.
- Several other libraries built and/or renovated in the 2005 – 2011 period are beginning to look a bit tired. New carpeting, upholstering, and, in some instances, new furniture is needed.
- The bandwidth available to all libraries is inadequate and is sub-standard. While this study is NOT a technology assessment, this factor limits OPL's ability to maximize the use of its facilities.
- While relatively new, the Elkhorn Library is poorly designed, inefficient, and inadequate to meet the public's needs. Some design and construction elements of the building are more appropriate for residential structures than for commercial/public buildings. The current structure (under 8,000 SF) is inadequate to meet current, let alone long-term, needs resulting from population growth. The building needs to be significantly expanded (more than doubled in size) or replaced with a much larger building.
- The expansion of the Florence Library enhanced library services in the northeastern portion of the City/County. Staff spaces are inadequate; however, this issue pales in comparison to challenges presented in other buildings.

- The Millard Library, although an exceptionally fine facility, is significantly overused. The branch library currently serves over one-quarter of the County's total population. The building is adequate to serve 60,000 to 70,000 people, but not the 150,000+ residents for whom Millard is the closest library.
- The Saddlebrook Library is an innovative and well-designed facility; however, it is not adequate to meet the current, let alone the long term, needs of north-central Douglas County.
- The Sorensen Library is a vital community asset and the renovation that was completed in the late 2000s enhanced library services in that neighborhood. However, the facility is beginning to look a bit tired. The library lacks much needed meeting room space and the space available for computer use is also inadequate to meet public demand.
- The South/Metro Library is innovative and attractive. However, the small size of its children's area does not match the demographics of the area, which includes the highest percentage of young children of any branch in the County.
- Much of the space in the Swanson Library is not available for general public use and the building's design limits its functionality and flexibility. Furthermore, the two-level design and entry point far removed from the parking lots are not consistent with the older demographic prevalent in the area.
- The Washington Library is a very attractive facility that provides critical services in the neighborhood it serves. It should serve the community well for many years to come.
- The Willa Cather Library is the poorest of the existing facilities (single-pane windows, inadequate power and data distribution, etc.) and needs to be replaced. Given its dearth of parking and the lack of adjoining property that would allow expansion, significant capital expenditures on this facility would be wasted.

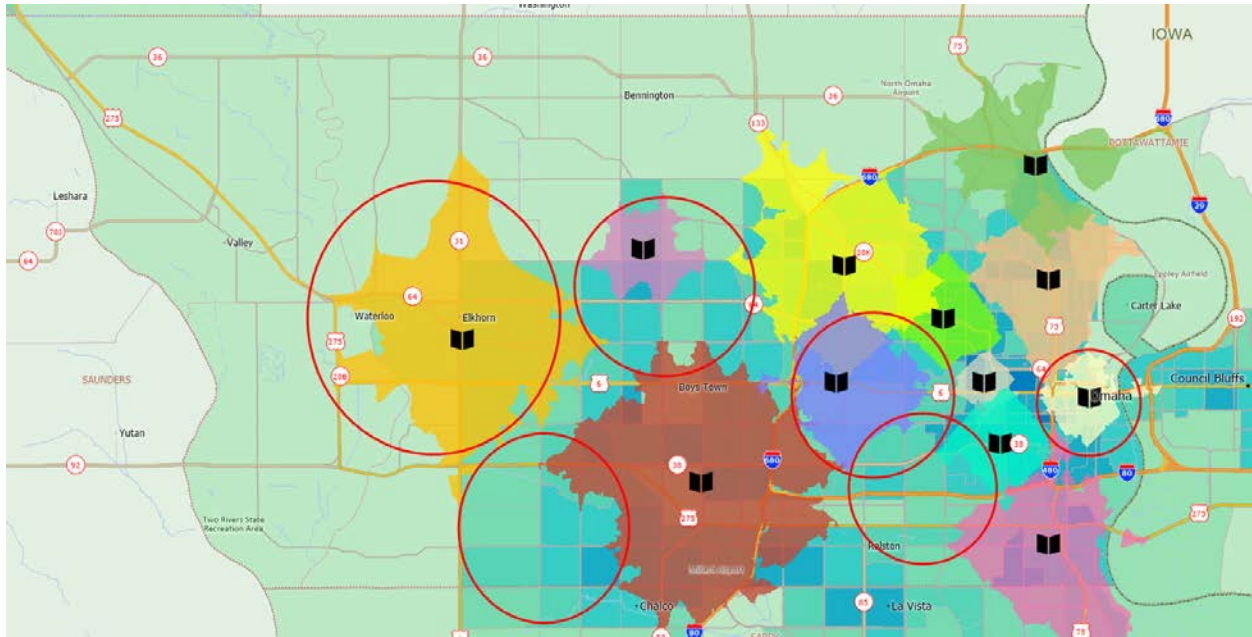
Principles

High quality public institutions, including public libraries, are essential to quality of life and are integral to the educational, cultural, and economic well-being of a community. The Omaha Public Library needs to begin to address its public library capacity needs in the near future or it is at risk of becoming increasingly irrelevant and a signal of the community's decline rather than its ascendance.

Himmel & Wilson recommends that the following principles be applied in OPL's efforts to grow its infrastructure:

1. Adopt the 0.75 SF/capita standard as the systemwide target for library development and a minimum 0.50 SF/capita for any individual branch. (Based on 20 year population projections.)
2. Use a maximum six-minute drive-time measure as the target for the construction of new/replacement facilities. (A replacement for Elkhorn is likely to create some drive-times exceeding six-minutes in very rural portions of the County.)
3. Reject short-term fixes to long-term problems. (The Saddlebrook Library was a short-term solution but fails to meet long-term needs.)
4. Address unserved/underserved areas first with long-term solutions.

Map 9 on the next page identifies areas of the County that the consultants believe will require attention over the course of the next twenty years. The priorities placed on these recommendations are the consultants'. Himmel & Wilson recognizes that funding, political realities and development opportunities may present themselves at times and in ways that may alter the order in which these projects are presented. However, OPL and elected decision-makers should, to the maximum degree possible, abide by the principles presented above.



Map 9
Service Gaps

Recommendation - Highest Priorities

1. New facility – North of Q Street on the 180th St. corridor. This would be a new 40,000 GSF branch and would serve approximately 70,000 people currently underserved in the area west of the Millard Library and southeast of the Elkhorn Library. Building this facility would solve two problems. It would reach many residents in a developed and growing area and it would take considerable pressure off of the over-utilized Millard Library.
2. Replace Willa Cather Facility – Center St. in the neighborhood of S. 63rd St (considerably farther west than the existing branch. This would be a new 35,000 GSF branch and would serve approximately 70,000 people. The new facility would continue to serve the traditional Willa Cather base but would add underserved populations to the west of the existing location and would reduce overlap with the South Omaha Library.
3. Replace Elkhorn Library – At or near the existing site but with better access to Hwy 31. This would be a new 20,000 GSF facility designed to be expanded to 35,000 GSF in the future. It would replace the poorly designed

and constructed existing building and would initially serve a primary population of 20,000 within the six-minute drive time and would eventually serve approximately 60,000 people.

4. Replace Main Library and Swanson Library – A new “Downtown Branch” Library at or near the existing W. Dale Clark site and a replacement for the Swanson Library that would serve as a new “Central Library.” The Downtown Library would be approximately 30,000 GSF and would provide primary service to approximately 20,000 area residents as well as serving the downtown workforce. It could be in a mixed use setting with the public library occupying the ground floor. The new “Central” Library would be built along the Dodge St. corridor somewhere between 72nd and 90th. The structure would need to be approximately 140,000 GSF in size and would house the OPL back of the house functions, Friends of the Library functions and would serve as both a regional branch library facility and as a research facility.
5. Replace the Saddlebrook Library – Fort St. near N. 156th St. This would be a new 15,000 GSF facility designed to be expanded to 25,000 GSF in the future. The new facility would replace the inadequate Saddlebrook Library and would initially serve a population of approximately 20,000 and would eventually provide primary library service to 30,000 people within a six-minute drive-time.

FINAL COMMENTS

As the Omaha Public Library begins to develop strategies to address its pressing space needs, it should place a high priority on integrating changes that are taking place in public library services in the 21st century. Public libraries across the United States are re-inventing themselves and, in many communities, have positioned themselves as central players in technological innovation, economic revitalization and community transformation. In short, public libraries are in the process of moving from a transactional model (places where you get something, e.g., check out books) to a transformational model (places where something happens that transforms individuals and the community, e.g., I learn a skill that helps me get a better job).

Many fine sources are available that address these changes; however, the following sampling provides a starting point for exploration:

- American Library Association – Libraries Transform
<https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2017/06/01/libraries-transform-progress-report/>
- Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries
<http://csreports.aspeninstitute.org/m/dialogue-on-public-libraries/2014/report>