

DEVELOPMENT

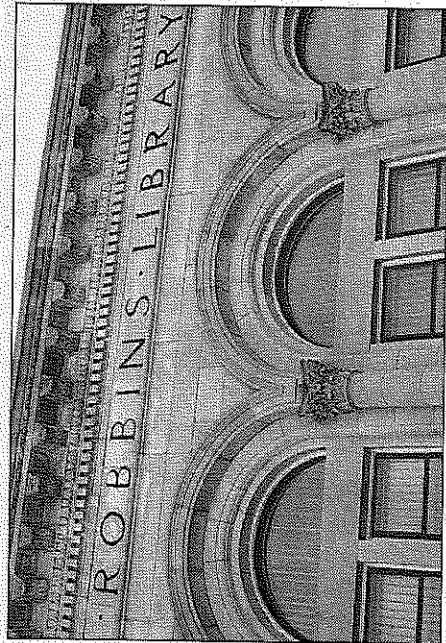
Libraries move into design phase of reimagining process

Public feedback will help influence the design

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The Robbins library, which hasn't seen a renovation in 25 years, and the Edith M. Fox Branch Library, which has never been renovated beyond basic improvements, will soon get facelifts. The initiative began when former Library Director Ryan Livergood and the library's Board of Trustees assessed the current state of both locations.

"[The Fox Library] is basically stuck in the 1960's in terms of décor, although we have some fabulous new signage that was funded by the Friends of Fox," said Library Director Andrea Nicolay. "As far as the Robbins, we just get so much foot traffic over the course of a year. We see roughly 300,000 visitors at the Robbins. So we're a little bit worn out right now."



The Robbins Library. Wicked Local File Photo

made up of some library staff members, two trustees, a representative from each library Friends group, a representative from the Arlington Libraries Foundation, and a representative from the town's Facilities Department. The working group is there to make sure the designs meet some of the needs brought forward at the community meetings and the priorities that have been identified for the redesign.

with the feedback from the public meetings, were given to Ann Beha Architects, the company hired to work on the library redesign.

Nicolay noted that this firm is well known for their attention to "honoring the historic aspects of the buildings that they work on and designing for 21st century functions within historic spaces."

Ann Beha was also the architect firm behind the most recent Cambridge Public Library redesign.

There is also a working group for the project,

similar to what has already happened in the children's room at the Robbins Library where there are now beanbags and small rocking chairs. Additional study space has also been considered, since the two study rooms at the Robbins Library are always in high demand, said Assistant Library Director Maura Deedy, as is a cafe space in the Robbins Library.

"What is a 'cafe space?' That's what we're grappling with right now," said Nicolay. "What can we offer that sends the signal to people that 'Hey, this is a great spot to sit with your kid and have lunch or have a snack' without making the person feel like they're disrupting other people."

Patrons who use other libraries in the Minute-man network brought up the use of open holds. This concept allows for patrons to walk in and find items they requested to be on hold on a specific shelf. They do not have to wait for a library staff member

to gather their items for them and they can use the self-checkout machine for an even speedier visit.

Looking ahead

Currently, Nicolay expects there to be designs for both libraries by January after which point they will be shown to the public. Funding for the project is also on the minds of Nicolay and Deedy. They do have some money through the library's trust, their Friends groups, the Arlington Libraries Foundation and some capital from the town. The Arlington Libraries Foundation will begin a capital campaign to raise money to help fund the reimagining project.

"Sometimes people are like, 'Why change, we love you.' And it's sort of like, 'Well we have been changing over the years.' If we look at what Robbins looked like 125 years ago it was different, it was smaller, there have been two additions," said Deedy.

What's changing

The libraries will not add on any square footage during the redesign. Instead, the current space will be reworked to best benefit both the library staff and patrons. Nicolay noted that, since the Fox Library is not currently accessible by Americans with Disabilities Act standards, there could be major changes to the exterior of the library impacting how patrons enter the building.

Patrons can expect to see more diverse seating,