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# Be Your Own Architect: Manage Renovation Projects Internally - Part II

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# BE YOUR OWN ARCHITECT:

## MANAGE RENOVATION PROJECTS INTERNALLY – PART II

BY ERIC C. SHOAF

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Part I of "Be Your Own Architect" appeared in the spring issue of TLJ. To access the article, go to [www.txla.org/tlj](http://www.txla.org/tlj).*

Larger library building projects usually require an architect to manage design and construction, but these days many libraries find that the results of space planning often are implemented in smaller less-expensive pieces rather than a single large project. Many of these projects involve re-purposing space freed from shelving or other uses, where the total of the project is to remove the shelves and place new furniture. Further, many have realized that architects and engineers are expensive, and when it comes to renovating an open space, it may be possible to use internal library staff to complete the project. Here some ideas to help with planning and designing limited design projects.

### The furniture vendor has designers

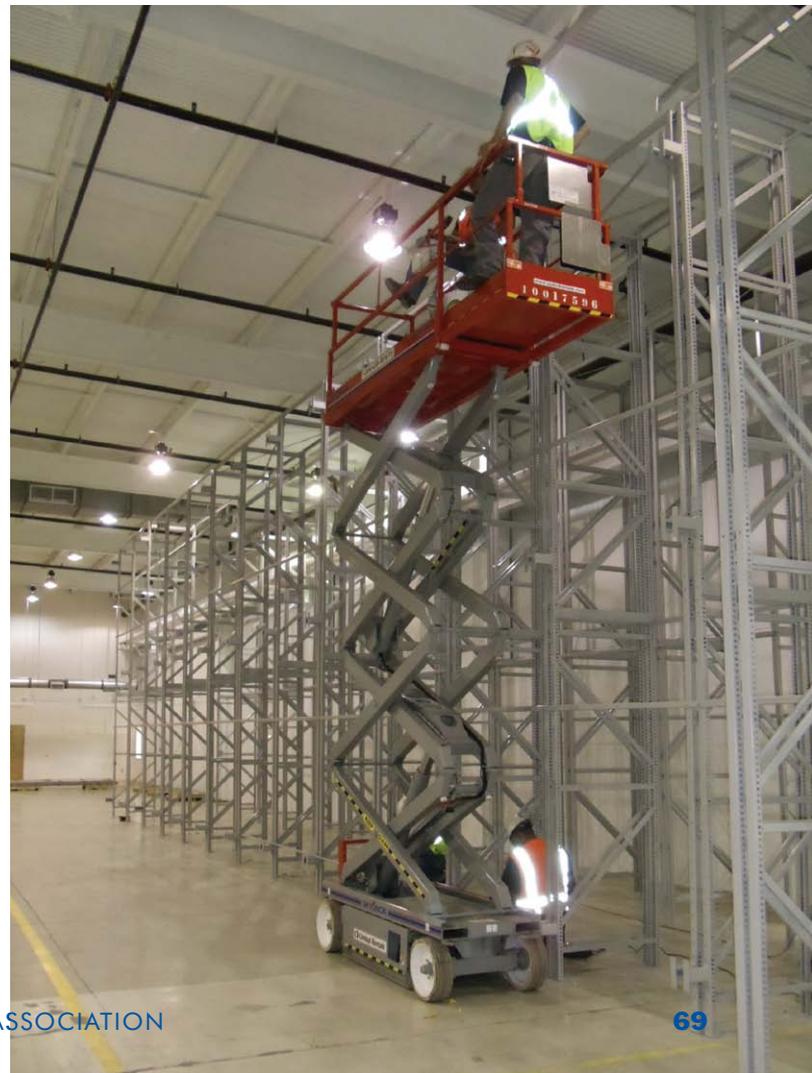
Larger furniture vendors often have an interior designer on staff that can help not only with furniture selection but also placement, and it is usually included as part of the sale – not an extra cost add-on. Library furniture manufacturers and sales companies stay attuned to the marketplace and are ready with new designs and styles of furniture to meet evolving needs. They also provide training to their workforce in new and anticipated changes in space use. Websites can provide a lot of the specifics, but nothing beats the personal

touch. If your local dealer understands the project your organization is planning, they will be able to provide a number of choices in furnishings and also help with color and material selections. The vendor's design staff can share advice on laying out the furniture within the floor plan and show options for the size and type of furniture that would best fit needs. Advances in software mean that the interior designer can provide 3-D drawings of the space from different angles for a better visual indication of the look of the space. This also allows library staff the opportunity to experiment with more than one option for furniture layout before making a purchase decision.

The most important elements to communicate to the furniture vendor and interior designer are the results of the programming work that was done and the resultant criteria of use document that was developed. Function drives the layout of the space and the best outcome comes from taking direction about use that derives from the planning work.

Furniture vendors typically do not charge for these design services, but offer them as a means to drive their business. In short, they assume you will make a purchase once the proper furniture is selected. It is important not to take advantage of this service, and to use it only if the organization is serious about a purchase and intends to follow through. This does not mean the library is obligated to buy, simply that professional courtesy should be extended to vendors and suppliers where possible.

Photo courtesy of Eric C. Shoaf



Interior designers know about furnishings and how to lay out space to meet stated functional needs and criteria for use. However, they are not specialists in building and fire codes. Before finalizing any plan, it is vital to have both the plans and the space inspected by qualified experts.

### I'm no expert – I know experts

Major building or renovation projects in the library will require a cadre of experts – the architect, engineer, communications specialist, furniture vendor, construction manager, and project leader. Even for projects that may be manageable by library staff, it is important and necessary for the do-it-yourself architect to “know the experts” in order for the job to be done right. Previously mentioned was the need for an electrician or engineer for planning and placing electrical outlets. Other experts also need to be consulted by the do-it-yourself architect. Fire safety is an important aspect of any space design. There are building codes that govern the size, number, and location of exits. The codes allow for different uses of space. Thus a collection of library shelving ranges has one applicable code whereas removing the shelves and creating a study area changes the code requirements. Public librarians can consult the city or county fire chief for an interpretation of the code in the designated space. At universities, the fire marshal is the one to call. Key things to remember are that furniture cannot block an exit path, that there must be sufficient exits for the number of persons seated in the room, and that exits must be clearly marked with both visual and audible fire alarms. If the area renovated has a sprinkler system, get advice on whether the changes to the space will affect water flow from the sprinkler heads. The fire safety expert will make suggestions and will also appreciate being asked.

Compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) is also a good standard to achieve though it is sometimes not necessary when the size of space renovated is small. The standards for alterations are not



Photo courtesy of Eric C. Shoof

always as strict as the standards for new construction and can depend on costs for the project and marginal costs to achieve compliance with ADA. Of particular interest is maintenance of what is called the accessible path of travel to an exit. Generally, costs for added alterations to the accessible path of travel in a renovated space are considered disproportionate only if they exceed 20 percent of the cost of the overall alteration. Section 8 of the ADA code deals specifically with libraries. Check with the local ADA compliance officer in the local government structure, or at the university or institution where the project is taking place. In designing a study space, a librarian certainly wants to be aware of issues related to access for wheelchairs, and there are specific provisions about this. Most cities, counties, and academic institutions have a designated office responsible for ADA compliance. Consult the expert for best application of ADA guidelines for the planned renovation.

Another important element in planning renovated space in libraries is the load bearing capacity of the floor mentioned in Part 1. Certainly this is an issue when putting up shelving for books or other library materials. Bear in mind that even moving some shelves from one side of the room to another may create an issue with floor loading. It is best to get

copies of the original floor plans for the structure. These are usually maintained by the institution or local government for a public library building, and the document should call out precisely the floor loading as designed. There have been instances where the loading was different in spaces on the same floor, so this is important. If the loading is a question, a structural engineer should be consulted. When shelving is being removed and re-purposed for a reading or study area it is not necessary to be concerned with floor loading.

### What a jolt – the electricity!

One of the most common complaints from library users today is a lack of electrical outlets in the library. Users want to charge their laptop computers, cell phones, cameras, tablets, ipods, and other battery-operated equipment while in use and they want to be comfortable doing so. For safety reasons, this means not having charger cables running out from chairs over to nearby walls where they are tripping hazard. Adequate sources of electricity to meet today's needs is something that may or may not be explicitly articulated in the criteria for use brief that is developed in the programming stage, but it is well-documented and deserves scrutiny. Public service librarians will tell you that, at present, you cannot go wrong with adding more electrical outlets. This will require the intervention of specialists – at the very least an electrician, and for larger projects an engineer, to insure that the job is done to code and that adequate circuits are available for additional outlets.

Placement of the electrical outlets requires some consideration because, when it comes to using them, library patrons sometimes forget about walkways. Cluster the electrical sources beside the seating areas. Investigate tables that sit next to the wall and feed electricity internally through cables to the tabletop. Comfy chairs positioned by a pillar or wall wired for electrical outlets is preferable to having wires running across the floor to user's electronic devices. While it is both elegant and convenient to have electrical

outlets in the floor, be aware that this often involves floor core drilling that is rather expensive. Unless involved in a major renovation, this is usually cost prohibitive.

## Punch list

Completing the project means a careful review once all the work is done and furniture is installed. Be sure every piece is accounted for, that all work is performed to a satisfactory level and that everything meets the design specifications. A “punch list” is the name given to the list of items left incomplete or not completed as required. Make a list and check it twice. If you have followed the steps outlined above, the new space should be inviting to users and offer the best facility to meet their needs.

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## Resources

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- EZ Blueprint - [www.ezblueprint.com](http://www.ezblueprint.com)
- Herman Miller Inc. *The Once and Future Library* - [www.hermanmiller.com/MarketFacingTech/hmc/research/research\\_summaries/assets/wp\\_Once\\_and\\_Future\\_Library.pdf](http://www.hermanmiller.com/MarketFacingTech/hmc/research/research_summaries/assets/wp_Once_and_Future_Library.pdf)
- Library Space Planning Think Tank at UNC-Asheville. Available at: [facstaff.unca.edu/sinclair/spaceplan/index.html](http://facstaff.unca.edu/sinclair/spaceplan/index.html)
- LJ Design Institute: *Six Space Challenges from Six Libraries: Library by Design*, September 27, 2011. Available at [www.libraryjournal.com/lj/home/892022-264/design\\_institute\\_six\\_space\\_challenges.html.csp](http://www.libraryjournal.com/lj/home/892022-264/design_institute_six_space_challenges.html.csp)
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- Visio - [visio.microsoft.com](http://visio.microsoft.com)
- Whole Building Design Guide: Libraries - [www.wbdg.org/design/library\\_st.php](http://www.wbdg.org/design/library_st.php) 🌐