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## Planning and Political Support: The Salem Public Library Experience

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# Planning and Political Support: The Salem Public Library Experience

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The Salem Public Library's strategic planning efforts began in 1987 with the publication of its first Library Development Plan. Staff worked with a citizen planning committee to produce the Plan. The surveys, statistical analyses, and consultant work that formed the foundation for the Plan's goals and objectives taught Library managers much about the public's view of the Library and the quality of its services.

The timing of the Plan was fortuitous, in that urban renewal funds became available at about the same time the Plan was published. The combination of thorough planning and good timing led to a sorely-needed \$6,000,000 expansion of the Central Library. Naturally, Library managers quickly became "sold" on the value of strategic planning.

The Central Library expansion took place in 1990. Since that time thousands of Library users have enjoyed the comfort and efficiency of a well-planned facility that provides adequate parking, a 300-seat Lecture Hall, an increasingly popular café, a Friends' Bookstore, quiet study areas, and other amenities. Without the work that went into that first Development Plan, Library users might still be squeezed into an inadequate building—one about half the size of the remodeled Central Library.

The 1987 Development Plan was based on the planning and measurement tools outlined in two American Library Association manuals, *Planning and Role Setting for Public Libraries* and *Output Measures for Public Libraries*. Subsequent Library Development Plans, produced during 1992 and 1997, continued this practice. Using the standard output measures in all three Plans has allowed the Library to compare long-term progress in reaching our goals.

The 1992 Plan helped pave the way for the construction of a new West Salem Branch Library and spurred the technological improvements that led the Library to offer both in-house and remote access to the Internet. Currently, the Library serves as an Internet Service Provider to about 5,000 subscribers in Marion, Polk, and Yamhill counties. Thousands of public Internet sessions and a wide range of free classes have helped bring Salem into the Information Age.

The passage of property tax reduction measures in the '90s led to major reductions in the Library's services. Since 1990 the Library system has seen staff reduced by 19 FTE, Central Library hours cut by 19 percent, Branch hours reduced by 25 percent, and the implementation of a variety of fees that have negatively affected the public's use of and access to library facilities and services.

These service reductions led Library supporters to rally and work towards the creation of a library district—a taxing entity that would be funded equitably by the population that naturally gravitates toward using the Library's facilities and services. The 1997 Library Development Plan called for the creation of such a district.

Initially, the City of Salem was reluctant to support the district movement. Over time the analysis, goals, and objectives of the 1997 Plan, as well as the encouragement of planning committee members, prompted the City to create a working committee to study the library district concept. Although the district effort has been derailed by temporarily insurmountable political stumbling blocks, the City still supports the district movement, and planning and working committee members still push for a greater Salem-area district.

The 1987 strategic planning effort set in motion a community-based process that continues to this day. Although Library managers regularly turn to the latest Development Plan to track progress toward goals and objectives, perhaps the most important outcome of the planning process has been the creation of a group of citizen supporters who believe in the Library and want to see it develop to adequately serve the needs of the community. The power of the political support that results naturally from the planning process can help any library fulfill its mission of community service. ☐

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