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## Big Changes with Little çchange: How to Renovate on a Tight Budget

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## Big Changes with Little çhange: How to Renovate on a Tight Budget

### Abstract

Public Libraries are often faced with the challenge of updating facilities to keep pace with customer preferences with limited funding. Based upon experience with bond funded renovations to multiple Richland Library locations from 2014-2020, this article shares strategies and case studies on how to make high impact changes while being sensitive to minimizing construction. Strategies include a customer experience design focus, reallocation of staff office space, use of color, selection of flexible furnishings, and integration of public art.

### Keywords

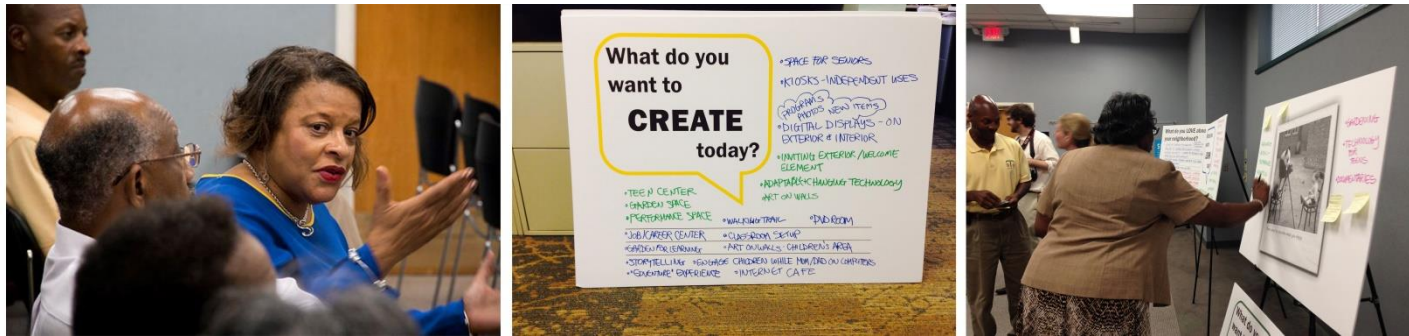
Renovation, Space, Community Engagement, Planning

## **Introduction**

In November of 2013, Richland County residents passed a \$59 million bond referendum to enhance their library facilities. Each location had a fixed total project budget associated with it to fund renovations, additions, furniture, technology and all related professional services. Each location also had an associated list of goals and visions to create 21st century library facilities which was augmented by public input. In all cases, at the beginning of the design process, the wish list exceeded the available funding. As such, the library leadership and design team worked together to prioritize and make the most of the available funding in ways that resulted in award winning transformations that, most importantly, have been well-received by the communities they serve and improved the value and relevance of the libraries. From the perspective of both the library staff and the architectural design team members, this article shares some of the strategies that result in “big changes with little change.” Cost sensitive strategies discussed and illustrated include: a customer experience design focus, reallocation of staff office space, use of color, selection of flexible furnishings, and integration of public art.

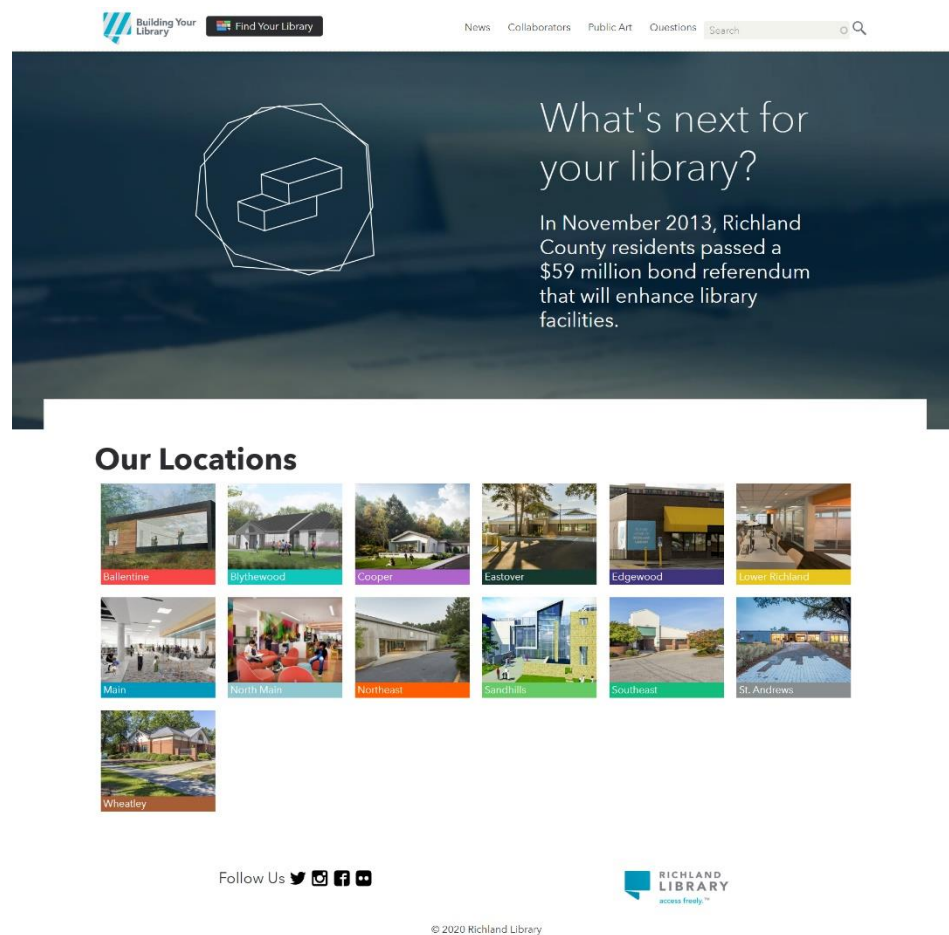
## **Customer Experience Design Focus**

For Richland Library, the design process started with visioning and robust public engagement which in turn helped the leadership make decisions that spent money on what was most important to users in each community. Based on this input, guiding design themes and activity focuses for each location were documented and shared.



**Figure 1: Richland Library Community Input**

Whether a teaching kitchen, multisensory room, makerspace, workforce development center, or a recording studio; each location was designed with a unique destination feature. The time spent on the front end listening to input and mapping desired customer experiences yielded clarity and focus around prioritizing the best uses of limited funding. Community engagement continued every step along the way, from design presentations to wall-breaking ceremonies with updates continually posted on [buildingyourlibrary.com](http://buildingyourlibrary.com).



**Figure 2: Richland Library [www.BuildingYourLibrary.com](http://www.BuildingYourLibrary.com)**

As a result, the transformed libraries are creative places celebrated by the communities that inspired the cost effective design strategies.

### **Reallocation of Staff Office Space**

One of the ways to offer new services and spaces to the public within an existing building is to examine staff space and determine if operations can be streamlined to perform the same tasks more efficiently in less square footage. Taking cues from the corporate world business model, staff desks can be streamlined and shared creating a collaborative work environment, thus decreasing the internal-use footprint. By also moving some traditional staff functions, such as program material and laptop storage,

to “front of house” you can reduce “staff only” square footage and potentially create new small meeting rooms or makerspaces.



**Figure 3: Richland Library Main Teen Makerspace**

Libraries are experiencing a paradigm shift, a new culture. The goal is to get staff out from behind walls and large desks. Staff are now working at free-floating circulation desks, walking the floor, and assisting patrons in makerspaces being more accessible.



**Figure 4: Richland Library Northeast Library Free-Floating Circulation Desk**

#### **Selection of Flexible Furnishings**

Easily moved and reconfigurable furnishings and operable partitions are allowing Richland Library to host a diversity of programs in constrained square footage. At the Main Library, the relocated and renovated auditorium is a non-traditional space. Lightweight stackable chairs and tables and portable stage can all be easily reconfigured or stored in adjacent space. When closed the operable glass partitions provide privacy for conferences and meetings; when open they allow for spillover space and an open invitation to musical events and performances or everyday study tables.





**Figure 5: Richland Library Main Flexible Auditorium**

At the renovated Southeast location, moveable glass walls and lightweight furnishings provide similar flexibility. At the renovated Northeast location a teaching kitchen and community meeting room are co-located in the same space, separated by operable partitions with writable surface and flanked by essential storage space. Cooking demonstrations can happen in the same room as arts and crafts and community events.





**Figure 6: Richland Library Northeast Flexible Classroom & Kitchen Space**

### **Integration of Public Art**

In order to give back to the community and promote the arts, Richland Library carved 1% out of the existing budget at each renovation and dedicated this money for public art, obtained through a competition process.



**Figure 7: Richland Library Main Art and Community**



**Figure 8: Richland Library Main Promenade Gallery**

Most of the art was created through workshops and with input from the public, which is also a cost effective way to create art that truly excites the people who come to experience each library.

At Main Library, space in the promenade for rotating local art exhibits is a dynamic amenity, highlighting the artist-in-residence's work every few months. In the Teen Center, bookmarks sketched

by library patrons became colorful wallcovering in the space. Public art in this way brings a sense of meaning to the community each time they visit, knowing they helped to create these finishing touches for the renovations. At North Main, users were taught to create hand-made books, which in turn because graphic metal panels affixed to the entry gates.



**Figure 9: Richland Library North Main Entry Gate**

One of the most cost effective ways to add vibrancy and a sense of place to a building is to utilize color in your furniture and finishes.

At North Main Library, we wanted to reflect the sense of joy the community had in their new space. The rich jewel-tones used throughout the flooring, paint, carpet, and furnishings convey that idea. When you embrace color as an element to the successful design of a library, it opens up creative avenues of community exploration.





**Figure 10: Richland Library North Main Interior**



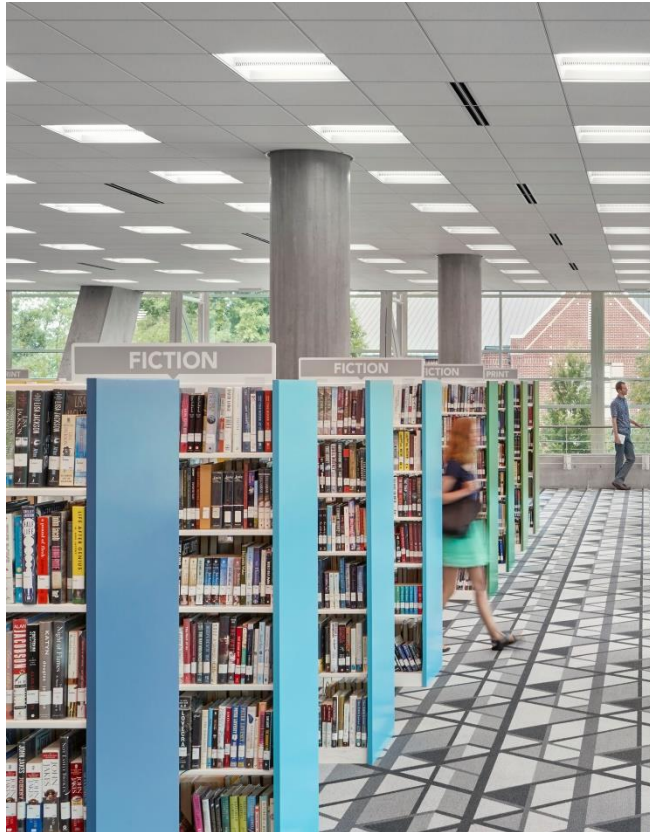
**Figure 11: Richland Library North Main Interior**

However, color doesn't always have to be bold. At Cooper, muted "tone-on-tone" colors work to highlight certain features and activity zones. The window nooks, created out of prefabricated metal panels, provide a subtle pop of color, while also providing seating and book storage in a minimal amount of square footage.



**Figure 12: Richland Library Cooper Subtle Color Infusion**

At Main, the design team elected to paint the end panels of the existing shelving to create an ombre effect throughout the space. Those pops of color help guide customers through the stacks, while using neutral colors elsewhere for durability in heavy foot traffic zones.



**Figure 13: Richland Library Ombre Bookshelves**

If a library has finishes that are worn and need replacing, using color on the new materials can be a good way to bring that sense of fun to the space with a minimal budget.

### **Conclusion**

Strategic planning and forethought by the library leadership allowed them to make “big changes with little change”. Early engagement with people in the community gave each of Richland Library’s locations a chance to provide experiences and services that benefit the neighborhoods. By exploring customer experience, staff needs, use of color, flexible furnishings, and public art the Richland Library network was able to make the most of their funding.