



CAMBRIDGE PUBLIC LIBRARY

MEMORANDUM

TO: Robert W. Healy, City Manager

FROM: Susan M. Flannery, Director of Libraries

DATE: December 27, 1996

RE: City Council Orders # 051, 11/18/96
055, 11/25/96

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OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

All libraries, including the Cambridge Public Library, evaluate and update their collections on an ongoing basis to ensure the best possible service to their constituents. Each year the Cambridge Public Library targets specific areas of the collection for "collection development" and "weeding". The Cambridge Public Library's Collection Development Plan calls for each area of the collection to be evaluated at least once every five years.

The purpose of this plan is to replace worn out, outdated, or lost materials; to fill in gaps that were overlooked in the selection process; to withdraw unnecessary duplicate titles and/or ephemeral materials that have outlived their usefulness; and to identify popular subject areas and those that are not being used. The knowledge gained through this process helps the library staff make more informed selections and use the library's limited resources in a way that serves the community most effectively. The Cambridge Public Library's collection is dynamic and relevant to the community's needs because librarians throughout its history have carefully and thoughtfully selected and weeded materials.

The Cambridge Public Library is designed to work as a unified system with a strong main library and six active branch libraries each tailored to the unique constituencies and needs of its immediate neighborhood. The primary roles for the system are:

Independent Learning: The library supports individuals of all ages pursuing a sustained program of learning independent of any educational provider.

Main Library	Boudreau Branch	Central Square Branch	Collins Branch	O'Connell Branch	North Branch	Valente Branch
449 Broadway	245 Concord Avenue	45 Pearl Street	64 Aberdeen Avenue	48 Sixth Street	70 Rindge Avenue	826 Cambridge Street
Cambridge, MA 02138	02138	02139	02138	02141	02140	02141
617-349-4040	349-4017	349-4010	349-4021	349-4019	349-4023	349-4015

Child's Door to Learning: The library encourages children to develop literacy skills and an interest in reading and learning through services for children, and for parents and children together.

Formal Education Support: The library assists high school students in meeting educational objectives established during their formal courses of study.

Reference Library: The library actively provides timely, accurate, and useful information for community residents.

Popular Materials Library: The library features current high-demand, high-interest materials in a variety of formats for persons of all ages.

The Main Library aims to fulfill all these roles; each branch library has selected the roles most appropriate for its clientele and neighborhood. As one might expect, the criteria for selection, collection development, and weeding is different from location to location. The Main Library may retain titles that a branch library finds inappropriate for its mission.

Throughout its history, the Cambridge Public Library has done its collection development and weeding by handling every item in a subject area; a very time consuming and inefficient method. Library automation has offered the possibility of streamlining the process through the use of tailored reports generated by the library's circulation system. After years of struggle, the Metro Boston Library Network (MBLN) is now able to offer its members such computerized reports. It is purely coincidental that the printouts we recently received and are currently using came shortly before our proposed move to the Minuteman Library Network.

The reports we requested from MBLN list every item in a given branch library which has not circulated in more than three years. The list includes reference materials (which do not circulate), long overdue items, items which have been missing for more than three years and, of course, items which are on the shelf but no one has taken out in the past three years. The availability of these reports allows the library to replace missing/long overdue items or withdraw them from the library catalog, to reclassify items that may require it, and to withdraw or transfer items that are no longer in demand at the branch. Classics or other critical works essential to a general library collection would be kept in spite of low circulation. Further, there are different guidelines for different parts of the collection. For instance, travel guides are weeded more quickly than any items in literature or history. There are no numerical goals for weeding. Each item is judged on its relative merits and not to fill some arbitrary quota.

Branch libraries are very small and are designed to house just the most high demand materials. They are supported by the extensive holdings of the Main Library and the availability of inter-library loan services. The most cost effective and active library branch is the Boudreau, which by necessity must zealously weed its collection. The argument could be made that it is so popular because it is a constantly changing collection of a manageable size for browsing.

The same care is taken with the withdrawal of materials as is taken with the selection of materials. Standard subject bibliographies are used, subject specialists may be consulted, and more than one staff person must review an item before it is withdrawn. Criteria for weeding includes: community need and demand, authority and reputation of author, viability of format/medium, timeliness, collection balance, multiple copies, and lasting significance.

The availability of the MBLN reports and the move to the Minuteman Library Network in July 1997 provided an excellent opportunity to reduce the cost of the data transfer from MBLN to Minuteman. The transfer cost will be based on the total number of item records moved from MBLN to the Minuteman database. If the records for lost and weeded items are deleted in advance, the cost for the move will be reduced. The items being deleted, in accordance with standard library policy and practice, would have been deleted regardless of the Minuteman move.

Weeding is a process which involves many considerations and an understanding that a library plays many roles. Unfortunately, no library can play all roles for its constituents. The Cambridge Public Library is located in an area with a wealth of superb libraries that we hope to compliment, not duplicate. Our resources, both financial and physical, pale in comparison. As wonderful as its collection is, Widener Library would be hard pressed to provide materials for home and/or car repair, children's materials, and popular fiction. Yet, the Cambridge Public Library can provide a wide array of materials in each of those areas. It would be impossible and imprudent for the Cambridge Public Library to try to emulate the Boston Public Library or Harvard University. Cambridge residents are indicating clearly to us during discussions of the Main Library expansion, that they are interested in cooperation with other institutions, not in duplicating resources.

The Cambridge Public Library collection development program is, and always has been, designed to best serve the citizens of Cambridge. The library staff takes its responsibilities very seriously and makes a concerted effort to maintain a high quality collection for current and future library users.

The Cambridge Public Library and the public libraries of Brookline, Newton, and Lexington are joining the Minuteman Library Network to get a higher level of automated services at a reasonable cost. Access to other library collections, especially the Boston Public Library, is available to all libraries regardless of their network affiliation. State legislation requires that the Boston Public Library collection be accessible to all state residents. Cambridge residents will continue to have electronic access to the BPL's collection even after the switch to Minuteman. The Minuteman Network includes the exceptional historic collection of the Concord Public Library, the academic collections of Framingham State and Lassell colleges, and the well rounded collection of the Wellesley Free Library, a sub-regional library center for many years. It would be difficult to identify the exact differences and similarities between the Cambridge Public Library and the Minuteman Libraries. Each community tries to buy the most relevant materials for its unique population. What membership in any automated network provides is the ability to access library collections on the opposite coast as easily as those in neighboring communities. Our intent is to offer the very best automated services to compliment our personal service and to extend the walls of the CPL to all corners of the universe; electronically, of course!



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EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
ROBERT W. HEALY
City Manager

RICHARD C. ROSSI
Deputy City Manager

January 13, 1997

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Please find attached a response to Awaiting Report Item No. 17, regarding a detailed report on the removal of books from the Library, received from Susan Flannery, Director of Libraries.

Very truly yours,

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/dls
attachment

Consent Agenda #1

Cal 11

Relative to a detailed report on the
removal of books from the Library.

5-30

In City Council January 13, 1997

Tabled on the
motion of Vice Mayor

BORN.
In City Council January 27, 1997
Report accepted.

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