

How Did We Get Here?

The Rice Public Library's Journey Towards a New Building

The journey towards a new building and location is not a new topic, but rather one that has developed over the past ten years. It has been the source of much discussion and debate for the Rice Public Library's (RPL) board and in our community as well. How we got here today is based on the events leading up to today's meeting. Let us review the process that got us where we are today.

The genesis for the idea of the library moving to the Frisbee Commons was not from the RPL's board, but rather from Jon Carter and the Frisbee Revitalization Committee (FRC). They approached the RPL with the idea of moving the library into the older two-story section of the Frisbee Elementary School. At this point the RPL board hadn't even considered moving the library from its current campus. The FRC had researched the concept of having the library as part of the new Kittery Community Center, thus making the location a true center for activity in Kittery. However, upon structural review of the Frisbee School, the engineer revealed the building was not designed to take the added load of the weight of books and could not be used in that capacity. Both the FRC and the RPL explored other options.

The next major step was obtaining the services of Aaron Cohen, a noted library consultant to evaluate our library, its usage and needs, and the needs of the Kittery community. As the RPL board wrestled with the question of whether we should move, we needed an objective and learned person to weigh all options available. Mr. Cohen spent two weeks evaluating our buildings, our staff's needs, our community's needs, the current demographics of Kittery, and even what the future demographics Kittery might be trending towards. His evaluation was thorough. Below are some of his findings:

- The Rice Public Library and Taylor Building are not in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines, meaning not all can access the library.
- There is a lack of space in both buildings for patrons, staff, and materials.
- The staff is divided between two buildings.
- The cost of maintaining and heating older buildings would increase over time.
- The Rice Public Library is not part of a community center at Frisbee Commons.

Over the next six years, the RPL has had two public sessions to discuss the community's concerns and ideas about building a new library. We have made three proposals on how the library could move forward, building on property at or near the Frisbee Commons or even in an existing structure. Each proposal brought us closer to our goal of providing a one story, ADA accessible building for all of Kittery's citizens at Frisbee Commons that is also energy efficient.

The Town Library Committee, a community based action group formed by Nancy Colbert-Puff and the Town Council to investigate the best solution for Kittery, requested the consideration of our current site proposal.

During the ten years I have served on the RPL's board, there has been one constant: our staff has provided exceptional service for the citizens of Kittery, despite working in a less than ideal situation. Imagine what they will be able to do for us when they are working in a new state-of-the-art facility.