

Manchester Library: History of a Community Partnership

The Manchester Library – has always been owned and operated by the community of Manchester as a partnership. Currently, the partnership consists of:

- 1) Friends of the Manchester Library (FOML), the all-volunteer organization that owns and operates the library building and community center as a 501(c)(3) corporation,
- 2) Port of Manchester which owns the land on which the library is built under a 50-year lease (@ \$1 / year) with FOML, and
- 3) Kitsap Regional Library which provides the librarians, books, media and systems and manages library operations.

This partnership is the latest in a progression. The Manchester Library was founded in 1947 in the corner of a hallway of the Manchester Shopping Mart. The books were provided by the Bremerton Regional Library, and the library was operated by volunteer librarians. The library soon moved to an unused chicken house and in 1953 to a pre-fabricated 16'x 20' building (on skids). The Manchester Improvement Club provided the fund-raising, and most materials and labor were donated. The Port of Manchester provided the location in a corner of their Manchester parking lot. The Friends of the Manchester Library (“the Friends”) came into being to meet the community obligation to provide maintenance, electricity, heat and insurance for the building – which they did with fund-raisers like the Salmon Bake. The Friends incorporated as a non-profit in 1976.

In the late 1970s, the Friends became aware of a US Farm Bureau loan program for community buildings, and secured a loan – with the concurrence that the loan would be paid off with Salmon Bake fundraisers. With the loan and much donated material and labor, the first 1200 ft² of the current library was ready for occupation in 1980 – and the 50-year lease with the Port of Manchester was established. Amazingly, the loan was paid off by 1986. The pre-fabricated library was moved to the leased property adjacent to the new building – and housed a used-book store operated by volunteers from the Friends with donations of books from the community.

A grant from Kitsap County provided the money to mount a similar effort to add the Community Center to the existing Library Building. A corner of the new Community Center was set aside to continue the Friends’ Bookstore, which with the Father’s Day Salmon Bake and Plant Sales covered the expenses of the library operations.

Now, the Friends of the Manchester Library is adding 900 square feet to our existing 2800 ft² footprint to accommodate expanded library programs without impacting the current community meeting space and book store area. This will **help write the next chapter** of the future of the Manchester Library.

After the library levy passed in Kitsap County in 2017, the Kitsap Regional Library (KRL) system initiated a “refresh” on existing library facilities. During the refresh design phase, it became apparent that the Manchester Library was too small for all the design ideas we wanted to incorporate (e.g., making one of the bathrooms handicap-accessible, adding needed space for children’s programming and expand the community space). To achieve all our joint goals, the Friends started planning an expansion of the existing library building. Once completed, KRL will complete the interior refresh of the library portion of the building.

The Refresh is expected to be completed by Spring 2022 – completing this chapter in the Library’s life !!