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## LET THE MAKEOVER BEGIN!

HOW TO TRANSFORM THE BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY  
FROM HULK TO HOT SPOT (HINT: ASK THE KIDS)

BY BELLA ENGLISH / PAGE 12



# MAKING THE HULK INCREDIBLE

## BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY REDO BEGINS WITH KIDS

BY BELLA ENGLISH | GLOBE STAFF

When it opened in 1972, the Johnson Building of the Boston Public Library in Copley Square was hailed as a shining example of noted architect Philip Johnson's modern design.

But today, the granite hulk is considered cold and unwelcoming, inefficient and ugly. This month a \$16 million renovation is beginning on the building at the corner of Boylston and Exeter streets to make it more user-friendly. It is the first phase of a design that will ultimately include work throughout the Johnson Building.

"Johnson has not had a significant public service improvement since it opened in 1972," says library president Amy Ryan. "The way people access information, we really need to move ahead and put the Boston Public Library at the forefront of that change." Founded in 1852, the BPL is the oldest urban library in the country.

Mayor Thomas M. Menino vowed to begin the transformation of the central library before he leaves City Hall in January, and the Boston City Council approved \$16 million for the first phase.

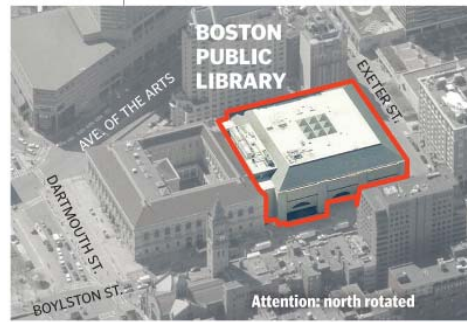
The initial phase is focused on the second floor of Johnson, with an expanded and improved children's library. The plan calls for doubling the space to about 4,400 square feet that will include a tween and a teen section, and the early childhood area.

The first-floor space that houses the current children's room may eventually house a retail concern such as a cafe or gift shop, but that would come after the renovation's first phase, which is expected to take a year.

The strategic plan is the result of feedback from staffers, trustees, and members of the public, including a community advisory committee and focus groups. One comment library officials kept hearing was that more age-appropriate space was needed. (Another, from a child, was "Add candy.")

"We are working to make it into one of the finest children's libraries in the country," says Michael Colford, BPL director of library services. "We want to improve our services to young people, and the idea is a journey, built by age level."

For the youngest users, there will be more "early literacy toys" that promote brain development, says Ryan. "We haven't really kept up with what we know about the development of children and



# TRANSFORMING THE JOHNSON BUILDING

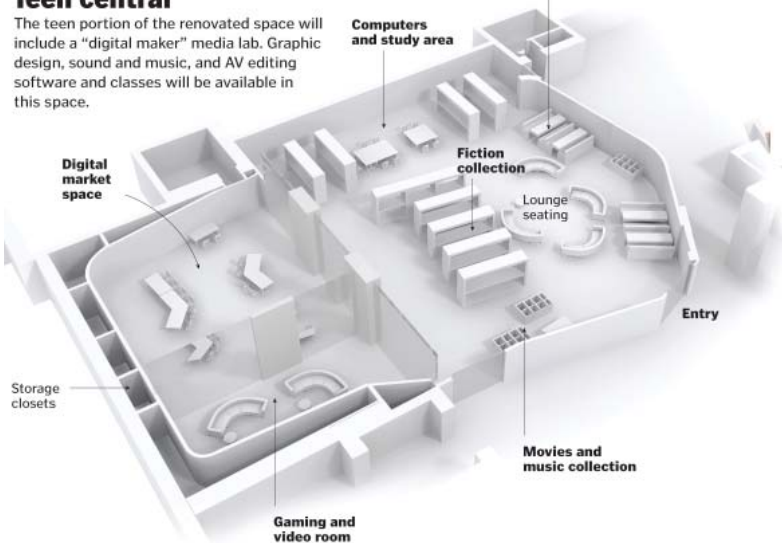
The second floor of the Boston Public Library's Johnson building will undergo a transformation beginning this month as the first phase of construction is underway. A new children's library and a teen center will be a large part of the renovation.

## The new second floor plan

The makeover will include additional work space and nonfiction collection power outlets.

### Teen central

The teen portion of the renovated space will include a "digital maker" media lab. Graphic design, sound and music, and AV editing software and classes will be available in this space.



reading skills at the very earliest ages, in their first year." There will be large toys and shapes with noises that the littlest ones can hold and play with, along with a story area.

A space will be carved out for tweens, ages 10 to 12, who are too young to feel comfortable in the teen area but want to be separated from the tots. For teens, there will be homework and hangout booths where they can study together.

"What's really great about the teen space is we'll put in software so teens can create music,

videos, graphics, and design work," says Colford. "There will be some classes there."

Library officials see the teen area as a transitional space, since teens are tomorrow's main library users. "Once they start talking to our teen librarians, it will be easier for them to be guided over to use the rest of the library resources," says Ryan.

Karen Cord Taylor has lived on Beacon Hill for decades and is a member of the library's community advisory board. "I was very compelled to be on



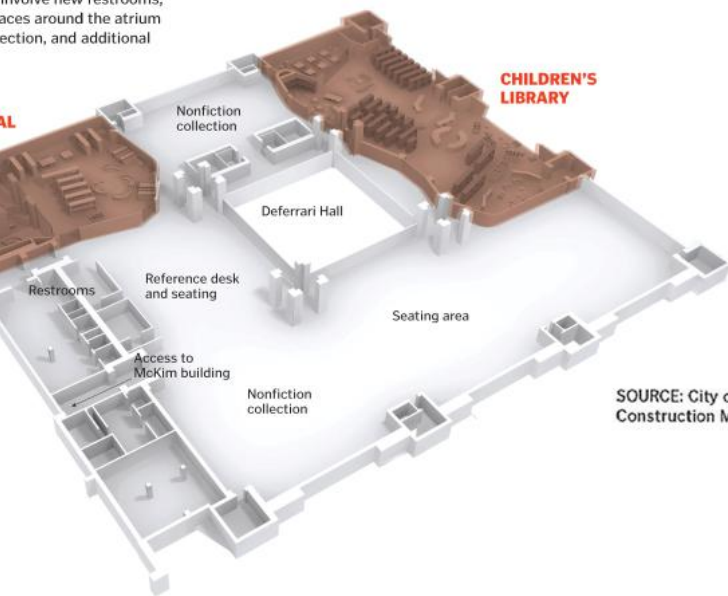
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### Children's library

Spaces in the children's library are designed to cater to the youngest readers. Features include: "Early literacy toys" meant to encourage brain development, a program room, storytelling area, and a space with computers for tweens.

**Program room**  
Includes bleacher seats, stackable seats, and movable tables.

**Tween zone**  
Homework area, computers, and lounge seating.

Lounge seating

Intermediate collection

Children's restrooms

Intermediate collection

Computers

EXETER STREET

Storytime area

Staff desk

Movies and music collections

Early literacy collection

Entry

Early literacy area

**CHILDREN'S LIBRARY**

Nonfiction collection

Deferrari Hall

Reference desk and seating

Seating area

Access to McKim building

Nonfiction collection

SOURCE: City of Boston Property and Construction Management Department

KEVIN UHRMACHER FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE AND CHIQUI ESTEBAN/GLOBE STAFF

The Boston Public Library was the first public library to have a reading room designed specifically for children.



CATHERINE J. WILLIS

A rendering of the plan for the exterior of the Johnson Building (left) shows glass panes exposing a more spacious lobby. Exterior changes to the building — to come in a later phase of renovations — will be made in consultation with the Boston Landmarks Commission because the building is a designated landmark.

this committee because of my dislike of the Johnson Building, and my love of libraries," she says. Of Philip Johnson, she says: "They should have gone for a lesser name and a better architect. From the community's point of view, the Johnson Building has never been welcoming."

With an imposing granite facade and obscured windows, the building is accommodating neither from the outside nor the inside, she says. "It's this big cavern and it's gray and it's cold and there's nothing to look at," says Taylor, a writer and for-

mer owner of the Beacon Hill Times. "You walk in and you really don't know it's a library."

In contrast, the adjacent McKim Building, built in 1895, is "decorative and pretty, there's stuff going on, and it's so much fun to look at," she says.

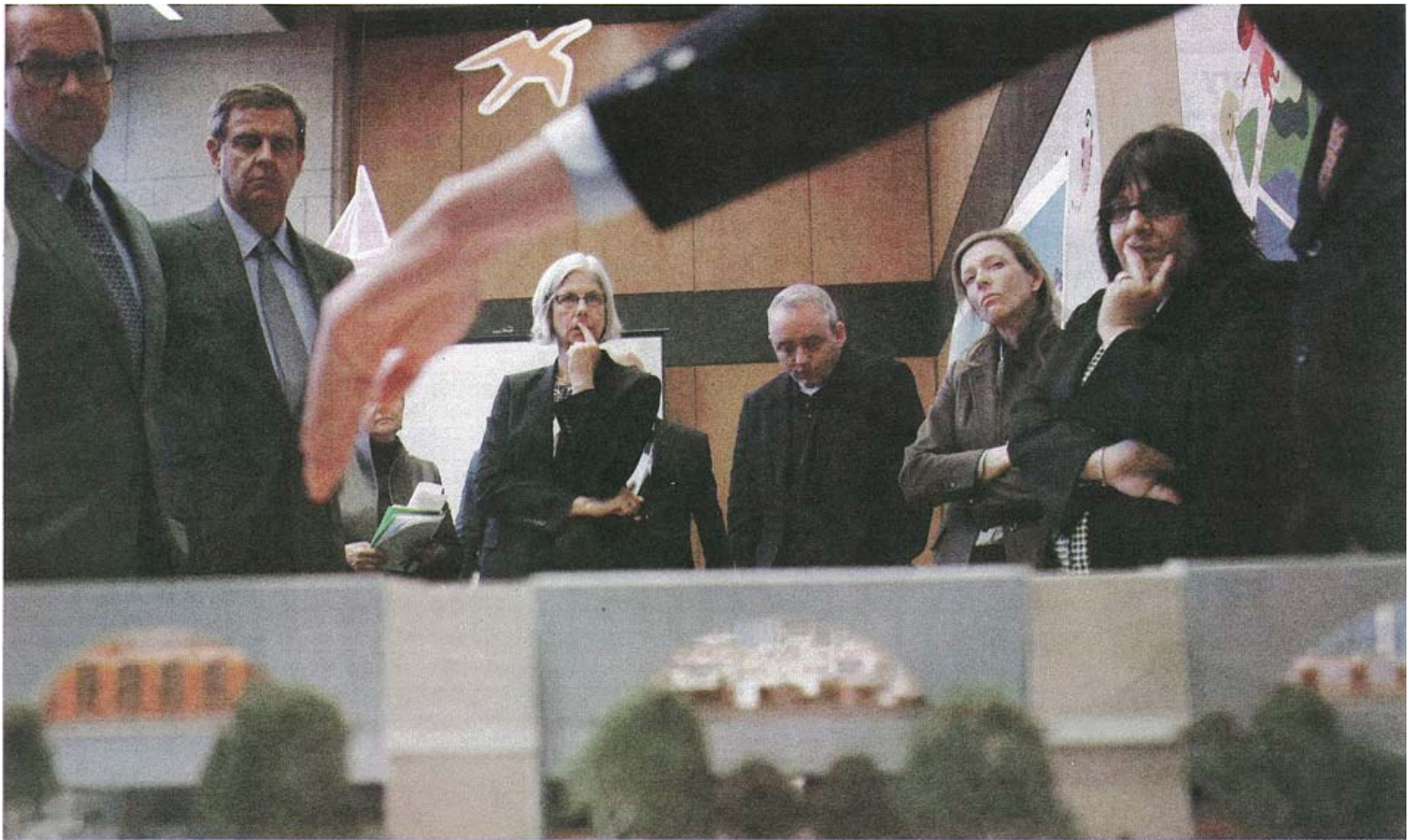
Today, Taylor says, urban designers are aware of the importance of curb appeal. "One of the good things about Boston is that people on the sidewalks are very connected to the buildings, whether it's Newbury Street or Charles Street or Boylston

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RENDERING BY WILLIAM RAWN ASSOCIATES, ARCHITECTS, INC.





PHOTOS BY JESSICA RINALDI FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Architect Clifford Gayley (his hand in foreground) points to parts of the renovation in a meeting with Boston Public Library trustees and board members.

*Continued from preceding page*  
Street," she says. "That's one of the reasons why Boston is so successful as a walking city. There's so much to see as you walk along."

'Many members of the public have encouraged us to be more entrepreneurial. We will look to see if there's a partner interested in that [first-floor] space for a retail opportunity.'

AMY RYAN, *president of the Boston Public Library*

The architect hired for the project is William Rawn Associates; Rawn has done the Cambridge Public Library, as well as the Mattapan and East Boston branches of the Boston Public Library, and uses glass and light liberally in his designs.

The Boston Public Library has 25 branches, but the central library at

Copley Place has 5,000 visitors a day, from locals to international tourists. And the numbers have increased, from 1.2 million in fiscal 2012, to 1.7 million in 2013.

"I've never seen a city so invested in learning and with such a high level of intellectual curiosity," says Ryan, who came to the BPL five years ago from Minneapolis, where she was director of the Hennepin County Library. "We need to support and advance that commitment to learning."

Perhaps the most controversial feature will be the exterior redesign, which may include a retail cafe or store on that first-floor site of the current children's room. "Many members of the public have encouraged us to be more entrepreneurial," says Ryan. "We will look to see if there's a partner interested in that space for a retail opportunity." Such uses as a bookstore, cafe, or gift shop are being considered for the exterior phase, which is still in the planning stages.

"It has to contribute to the visitor experience," Ryan says. "It has to complement our uses. It wouldn't be a liquor store or something like that."

One of the complaints about the central library is that it's too big. "People say they can't find anything to read," says Ry-



Architect Andy Jonic holds artists' renderings showing the BPL group the planned renovation of the children's room and addition of a teen center.

an. An expanded book section located on the first floor, next to the retail space, is planned, with fiction and nonfiction, biography, travel, DVDs, and CDs. The mezzanine may be transformed into a community learning center, with conversation circles for those learning English.

"At the end of all of this, this is going

to be the best urban library in the country," says Ryan. "We'll have a wonderful learning, sharing, and thinking environment."

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