

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

March 2004

“He’s like a Super Librarian y’know? Everyone forgets, Willow, that knowledge is the ultimate weapon.”
from Buffy the Vampire Slayer

...but, and here’s the rest of the story:

“In the non-stop tsunami of global information, librarians provide us with floaties and teach us how to swim.” Washington Post, 1/13/2001 Linton Weeks

Role Setting and Goal Setting – opposite ends of the continuum – both result from deliberate choices – both are mutually dependent. For Bellingham Public Library a critical issue then becomes, who makes those choices? What choices must be made? How can the library be protected from forces malignant and benign (even benign tumors kill), considered and chaotic, thoughtful and thoughtless, or intentional and random? Should it be? Does the library have any inherent worth? Or, is it expendable? Does a library require a critical mass? ...of collections? of staff? of programs? of space? of funding?

As I’ve begun to develop the budget and alternatives the questions posed above seem far less rhetorical and abstract than they have at other times. In my next and last report I’ll bore you with all of the details. Yes, there have been other budget crunches, but always with the sure belief that the good times would once more roll. Yes, there have always been loons who believed the earth was flat and that books could be bartered for bread – I think that period was known as the Dark Ages, but even then few seriously challenged the concept of a common good; likewise, the government, or well-intentioned do-gooders have tried to legislate morality, but neither institutions nor individuals had access to the tools and methodologies that can now be convened easily, almost instantaneously, to achieve realities once impossible. ...consider the worm, virtual or organic.

As you move into the planning model, I hope that you weave a grand dream. I hope you don’t settle for “good enough.” The consequences of that initial compromise are increasingly apparent. Bellingham Public Library is an extraordinary institution, not because of its adequacies but in spite of its inadequacies. Imagine what it could become with planned, integrated spaces, adequate funding and sufficient staff to achieve goals commensurate with public demand.

People have asked me about my preference for a new library site; however, I’ve never commented in deference to committee interests, board interests, executive interests, council interests and even perceived public interests. That being said, I’ve always believed it is important to acknowledge the need for a monumental statement that serves the public aesthetic and embodies intellectual stimulation, a working tribute to form and function that serves all of the people all of the time, not only those who can walk in the parks, or climb a mountain, or ride a bike; not those who can afford to take a class, or pay a personal trainer, or buy a book or a ticket to a play or an exhibition pass; not just those who have a corner office with floor to ceiling windows, or a condo with a million dollar view. I would wish that every citizen, every school child, every visitor, every person with a dream, or a vision, or a problem could come to the Bellingham Public Library and be inspired, soothed, awed and renewed not only by the contents of its collections but by the majesty of its views -- winter, summer, spring and fall.

Bellinghamsters deserve better than enough – the library is the only place that serves all, if only that had persuasive authority. That the bluff should become the private domain for an elite few seems a travesty beyond all understanding. ...but then, I'm a dreamer, not a combatant. That we could all scan the vista that conjures a paradise unlike any I've ever seen is my dream.