Mount Allison University has determined that the Ralph Pickard Bell Library (hereafter Library) requires a major renovation and revitalization. Many of its systems are outdated and/or do not serve the needs of our community in the ways we would like. In order to sustain the ever-changing requirements for this focal academic teaching and learning space, a comprehensive renewal by 2025 is imperative. We need a modern facility that will support students and staff from all University faculties, as well as the Sackville community, far into the foreseeable future.

In spring 2017, a consultation process was initiated to develop a vision for a renovated Library, working with Teeple Architects and exp architects. The goal was to have our consultants work in unison with the University community, including our staff, students, and other stakeholders, to gain an in-depth understanding of the intended functionality and aesthetic of the building. The Library is a significant learning hub for all members of the community; it was thus crucial to glean as much information as possible from user groups before discussing detailed design.

The consultation process included information sessions, an online survey, focus groups, and group workshops. By actively listening and engaging in discussion, the resulting design(s) will be specifically tailored to the needs and desires of the Mount Allison community. A dedicated website was developed to document the consultation process: https://www.mta.ca/facilities/library/

A key outcome is the “MTA Library Report”, which provides the context for the vision summarized in this document.

Context and guiding principles

Contemporary libraries provide a form of sanctuary for their communities. They should be places where patrons are able to gain knowledge and skill sets in an inclusive and stress-free environment. Over the past several years, our understanding of the negative impacts of stress in the learning environment has improved. Our consultants tell us that the LearningSCAPES 2018 conference (Chicago, IL, USA) focused heavily on communicating design strategies that mitigate and alleviate stress in various types of learning environments.

A renewed Library will need to be flexible and able to accommodate various needs and learning styles. Attention must be paid to factors such as acoustics, artificial and natural light, learning styles, furniture selection, activity types, technologies, etc., to create learning spaces that are inclusive and effective. It is critical that our choices result in a renewed Library that will serve our needs, both known and yet known, for another 50+ years.
As one might expect, seeking universal agreement for any design parameter is not possible. Our consultants identified many overlapping themes, some of which harmonized into clear directives from stakeholders, while others did not. At the end of the process, the following guiding principles emerged:

Guiding principles

1. The re-imagined Library will be unique to Mount Allison. It will be a dynamic learning hub while retaining strong attributes of a traditional library. Books will have a physical place in a Library that has diverse, multi-use spaces and is well-suited to our increasingly digital world.

2. The Library will be connected to the campus and community through improved views and indoor/outdoor learning opportunities.

3. The history of Mount Allison will be embedded in the learning experience within the Library, through art exhibits, displays (both physical and virtual), and incorporation of historic artifacts.

4. There will be improved inclusivity, accessibility, and natural way-finding to maximize learning opportunities and comfort in Library spaces. Principles of universal design will be followed.

5. The Library has several unique special collections and significant archives, which will be featured prominently.

6. The Library will be a modern space that is light, bright, and welcoming with natural daylighting and enhanced views to the exterior spaces of campus.

7. Environmental sustainability is a key priority for our communities. The design must result in significant improvements in building energy performance; full building-envelope upgrades are imperative. Consideration will be given to using alternative mechanical systems and sustainable building materials to suit building uses and goals.

8. Acoustic performance of interior spaces will be effectively designed to maximize the performance of the learning environments.

9. Strategic placement and integration of staff services points within the layout must be critically assessed to support cooperation and collaboration amongst staff and students.

10. The design and planning must ensure effective synergy between furnishings, patrons, and the physical spaces, to ensure comfort and an effective learning environment.

11. Finally, the Library is one of the most prominent buildings on campus and within Sackville. We must take advantage of this position within our community by conveying a dynamic vision of the Library for the 21st century, with strong roots in its historic context.
Next steps

The guiding principles will now be used to develop appropriate conceptual designs. We must also prepare a functional assessment and begin to think about activity placements in the Library. Specific subgroups will be needed to work on refining specific project aspects. For example, a renewed Library must be energy-efficient; what technologies will be used to achieve this criterion? What facilities will our technical services staff need in the future and where will they be best placed in the building? In short, there is still much work to be done before detailed architectural drawings are prepared.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Libraries 2025 Vision Committee established</th>
<th>Focus group sessions</th>
<th>Prepare functional program with preliminary activity placements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OCTOBER 2017</td>
<td>MARCH/APRIL 2018</td>
<td>SPRING 2019</td>
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<td>MARCH 2018</td>
<td>SPRING/SUMMER 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structural investigation of existing building</td>
<td>Survey (644 responses) Student focus groups</td>
<td>Summary of work Vision statement created</td>
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<td>FALL 2018</td>
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Case for support

This process was initiated because our current Library is not serving our needs. Many spaces lack the flexibility needed for multiple uses, lighting is poor, it lacks the accessibility features expected, its mechanical systems are failing, and so on. Simply put, it is not the dynamic, flexible, and effective learning environment that we need.

We are now ready to take the next steps. Our vision is determined. We will celebrate and showcase our heritage, while designing a modern Library for the 21st century using the existing R.P. Bell Library as the foundation. Our renewed Library will be flexible, environmentally sustainable, built using universal design principles to exceed existing and future standards, be open and bright, showcase our special collections, and be a comfortable, inviting, and effective learning environment.
We know that our current students value ‘going to the Library’. When this project is complete, we know that ‘going to the library’ will be a transformed experience for our students, as the R.P. Bell Library becomes an even more integral and valued part of every student's experience at Mount Allison.

Libraries 2025 Vision Committee

Jeff Ollerhead (co-chair)          Jason MacDonald
Kim Meade (co-chair)              Robbie Moser
Marc Truitt                       Noah Fry
Nauman Farooqi                    Shelly Colette
Elizabeth Stregger                Neil MacEachern