Would you ever want to live and shop on top of or next to your library that is part of a mixed-use development? Cities looking to catalyze on a library's energy and flow of people could consider the development of a library as a component in a mixed-use project, which is development that integrates multiple components such as residential, office, and civic uses. Including a library in a mixed-use development could ease the public burden on the high construction and maintenance costs of building and operating a library while also attracting new tenants or residents. Cities across the US are contemplating or have executed on this model including Milwaukee, Marion, Portland, and New York.

Although only 30% of Americans are considered highly engaged with public libraries, library visitors are diverse and reliant on numerous services provided by the typical public library. Libraries are key community assets offering a range of valuable services for people of all ages, education, and income levels. According to the Information Policy & Access Center, over a majority of libraries, rural and urban, provide high-speed internet access, computer skills training, summer reading, and basic literacy courses. Many libraries are also providing STEM training programs and assisting individuals seeking jobs or health insurance.

What are the benefits to a mixed-use library building?

For neighborhoods that are lacking civic space and development in their core, a mixed-use library could be a great solution.

1. The project could likely support a larger loan because of the stability and credit provided when a public entity is a tenant in the project.
2. Retail tenants looking to move in with a library would not only benefit from that larger loan but also from the increased activity around their shop as library patrons and residents or customers visit the library.
3. If successful, a mixed-use project could catalyze further development in the area and activate the surrounding neighborhood due to the additional traffic generated by the mixed-use development.
4. Since a library is likely to have day patrons, there is an opportunity for shared parking particularly when a library is paired with apartments which need more night-time parking versus day parking.

What does it cost to build a library?

Marta Murvosh wrote a great series of posts featured in Library Journal delving into the different ownership structures and construction costs of a site that combine other uses with a library. Below are a few examples highlighting successful mixed-use library developments.
Despite the benefits of including a library in a mixed-use project, this kind of development could lead to a number of legal and financial issues that would need to be resolved. With multiple entities and uses complicating the project, there are many success stories to buoy the complications that may arise throughout the planning and development process.

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