OPENING DOORS

Re-imagining the Woodbridge Public Library

STRATEGIC PLAN 2017 - 2022
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July 2017

Circa: November 5, 1963: The Free Public Library of Woodbridge was officially founded via Public Referendum. The modern-day Woodbridge Public Library (WPL) represented a continuation of the Township tradition of library service that began with the opening of the Barron Library in 1877. This tradition was furthered throughout the first half of the twentieth century when women’s clubs, parent organizations and other civic and neighborhood associations funded, opened and staffed eight small libraries in separate sections of the Township. In 1964, these neighborhood libraries joined the municipal library system and became its first branches – ultimately combined as the Fords, Henry Inman, and Iselin branch libraries.

The Woodbridge Public Library has never been more important or useful than it is today. In this era of ever-expanding information, libraries help residents make sense of the world. In buildings, the WPL’s core services thrive with more books, open hours, story times, programs, and access to and assistance with technology. Online, the WPL has expanded the gate to the information highway in our buildings, at work, and on-the-go. And, in our ever-expanding community of more than 100,000 residents, 24 schools, and dozens of community associations and organizations, the WPL extends itself beyond bricks and mortar to meet the needs of our users – and our potential users – wherever they are.

Fulfilling the WPL’s 21st century potential may take some time, but I believe we will deliver on the vision contained within these pages. The Woodbridge Public Library Strategic Plan 2017-2022 exemplifies a commitment to our community whereby we will continue to evolve and pursue opportunities that permit the WPL to embrace a philosophy of lifelong learning.

The WPL is committed to investing in the future of Woodbridge and is dedicated to providing library services in modern updated facilities that respond to the way people work and learn today. The WPL will secure the advocacy, support and financial resources to ensure its future and develop the best staff and trustees. In short, as Mayor, I am committed to ensuring that the Woodbridge Public Library will continue to stand as the Township’s premier location for personal growth, community engagement and lifelong learning.

Best regards,

John E. McCormac
Mayor
A LETTER
to Woodbridge Friends and Neighbors

June 2017

Dear Friends,

The value of a great library is in the opportunities that are created in the lives of community members, whether it be access to technology, literacy, pursuit of citizenship, self-improvement, lifelong learning or social engagement. Charting a course for Woodbridge Township Public Library to reach everyone with library services they need could only have been accomplished with many minds on the task.

On behalf of the Library Trustees and Staff of Woodbridge Public Library, we would like to thank Mayor McCormac, Woodbridge Township staff, and everyone who offered their time and talent to produce this 2017-2022 Strategic Plan to Woodbridge Township residents, businesses and organizations. Library Development Solutions provided guidance through the research process to analyze gaps in service, public opinion, community partner input and included library staff aspirations. We hope you will agree that it was a valuable and insightful exercise, and we are eager to get started.

Sincerely,

Monica F. Eppinger, MLS, CPLA, Library Director

Peggy Mayerowitz, President, Library Board of Trustees
INTRODUCTION
In 2016, the Woodbridge Township Mayor, Business Administrator, and Woodbridge Public Library Board of Trustees began discussions about the need for a new strategic direction for the library. Soon after, the Township issued a Request for Proposals to find a consultant to work on a project to evaluate the Library’s service program, identify community needs, and develop a strategic plan. The Township engaged Leslie and Alan Burger from Library Development Solutions to lead this effort. During this same time, a search was underway to select a new library director to lead the library into the future. Monica Eppinger, the Library’s new director, joined the Library staff in August 2016.

A Strategic Planning Committee consisting of members of the Board of Trustees, library administrators and staff, local business and civic leaders played a key role in developing this plan. To prepare, the Committee gathered information relating to library trends, identified service priorities, considered the library’s internal strengths and weaknesses along with external threats and opportunities, and evaluated and identified future strategic directions for the Library. A community survey and series of “community conversations” about the Library provided invaluable information to help inform the Planning Committee’s recommendations.1

The Board of Trustees and the Woodbridge Public Library staff are committed to providing responsive library services, programs, and resources to everyone in Woodbridge. The Library’s new vision, mission, goals and objectives along with a suggested action plan are designed to align with the community’s needs and interests.

1 The first step was an overall evaluation of the Woodbridge Public Library by the consultants which resulted in a report entitled, Woodbridge Public Library: Envisioning the Future.
PLANNING STEPS: Information Review

The Strategic Planning Committee reviewed library use statistics, the consultant’s evaluation, and metrics regarding collection size, number of visits, programs and program attendance, and circulation. The Committee discussed current and future needs of all groups in Woodbridge’s growing community. The Committee also read and discussed recent articles about nationwide trends in publishing, technology and libraries.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN: Survey and Community Conversations and Technology Review

During the planning process, the consultants gathered comments and suggestions about the library’s future from five community conversations that included each branch.

Five hundred seventy seven people responded to an online and print survey. This effort generated many suggestions regarding desired services and facility improvements, as well as many comments about current library services. The consultants used this data to produce a trend and gap analysis in a report entitled Community Comments. The consultants and Committee members reviewed suggestions for the future to inform their recommendations.2

The consultants reviewed the library’s technology infrastructure and its public access to digital hardware, software, and instruction and analyzed its social media reach.

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2 The report is available in the library.
PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Strategic Planning Committee met several times to:

• Identify social, technological, and demographic trends that may affect the delivery of library services.

• Consider the Woodbridge Public Library’s internal strengths and its capacity to deliver responsive library service.

• Identify the challenges the library faces, particularly regarding increased and diverse populations and aging facilities.

• Develop a vision/mission statement describing the Library’s primary purpose.

• Discuss and agree upon goals to guide the library’s path for the next few years and develop a specific and flexible action plan.
WE HEAR YOU
We heard many ideas and suggestions about the future of the WPL. We spoke with 125 people during a meeting in each of the library locations, most of the staff, and we heard from 577 people through an online and print survey.

You told us to:

• Reimagine, repurpose and refresh all WPL locations so they can better serve rapidly changing community needs and interests.

• Refresh and unclutter collections with more new print titles and digital content and remove damaged, obsolete and inaccurate materials.

• Respond actively to the needs of teens and preteens with expanded programs, homework help, tutoring, structured after-school resources, and more up-to-date mobile computing devices, including gaming resources.

• Meet the needs of the growing population of new immigrants and new residents, some of whom may be first time English speakers.

• Respond to changes in Woodbridge’s demographics, including increasing numbers of dual income families, a growing diverse population, with services and programs that address their needs.

• Expand access for all to digital resources and devices.

• Provide small group meeting and quiet study space.

• Address parking-related issues at all of the branches.

• Improve hours to accommodate working families.

• Encourage community engagement by connecting residents with each other through programs, conversation and discussion at all of the libraries.

• Increase awareness of the library’s collections, programs, facilities and staff expertise.
ACCOMPLISHMENTS
This plan outlines a major new direction for the Woodbridge Public Library for the next several years. Below is a list of some recent improvements. The Library’s commitment to meeting community needs with friendly service as its most important focus.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Developed the Woodbridge Digital Public Library with access to digital information, e-books, audiobooks, streaming video and music.

- The Children’s Department Summer Reading Club achieved a 22% increase in participation and an average of 50,000 hours of reading per summer, over the last five years. Teen and Adult Summer Reading Clubs have become established.

- Established a reputation for access to Local History print and digital collections.

- Implemented an on-line meeting room management system that allows for public booking.

- Upgraded AV capacity in all meeting rooms to include Blu-Ray players and new projectors.

- Improved evaluation tools to gather data about library use with digital door counters and a reference transaction tracker, Gimlet.

- Implemented patron e-mail notices, which include a pre-overdue notice, and a library catalog app.

- Engaged with new library audiences by establishing a Woodbridge Public Library presence on Facebook and Twitter.

- Launched an e-mail newsletter to improve communication with patrons.

- Installed new printer-scanner-copiers in all locations that will allow for wireless printing.

- Joined Mutual Reciprocity Among Libraries (MURAL)--a reciprocal borrowing group that includes 45 libraries in Middlesex and Union Counties.
• Implemented an on-line staff scheduling app to allow management and staff access to system-wide, updated schedules.

• Increased children’s and toddler’s programming by 25% and young adult programming ten-fold due to the hiring of new staff.

• Introduced a weekly Next Chapter Book Club for adults with disabilities by partnering with the NJ Institute for Disabilities, now in its third year.

• Added two new AWE literacy stations and 25 literacy launch pads for pre-school and elementary age children throughout the library system.

• Conducted in-house staff training for all library staff in the following areas: customer service, mental health, anti-harassment training and active-shooter training.

• Enhanced the physical appearance of every branch and the Main Library with new carpeting.

• In conjunction with the Maintenance Department’s efforts, improved the outside grounds appearance by removing dead trees and years of overgrown shrubs.

• Improved infrastructure with new boilers and a cooling tower at the Main Library and a new HVAC system at the Henry Inman Branch.

• Refurbished the Henry Inman meeting room thanks to a local Eagle Scout project.
VISION

The Woodbridge Public Library is the Township’s premier location for personal growth, community engagement, and lifelong learning.

MISSION

The Woodbridge Public Library connects people to their past, present and future. The Library engages the community to provide opportunities for all to meet new challenges in a rapidly changing world.

OUR SHARED VALUES

• We provide safe, welcoming libraries that are easily accessible to all.

• We provide open access to information, library materials and services.

• We provide services and programs that inform and delight our community.

• We provide friendly, knowledgeable, unbiased service and value diversity of thought.

• We support and promote literacy, the pursuit of citizenship, lifelong learning and community engagement.

• We support a staff that is eager to learn, grow and change.

• We value civility, collegiality and teamwork.

• We collaborate with local organizations and each other to make Woodbridge a better place to live, learn and work.
There are three ideas that informed the plan’s goals.

Enhance the Customer Experience
We want everyone in Woodbridge to rediscover the library and to see the Township’s libraries as an essential community resource.

Build a Better Community and Create a Strong, Well-Loved and Supported Library
We believe that the library can be an important partner with other Township agencies, non-profits, and the business community in helping to shape Woodbridge’s future.

Engage the Staff
We know that exceptional, responsive customer service is essential to increasing interest in and use of the library. A staff that is engaged, always thinking about the future and committed to innovation and dynamic service will make a real difference at the Woodbridge Public Library.

GOALS

GOAL 1: The Woodbridge Public Library will be a not-to-be missed destination and a point of pride for everyone in the community.

GOAL 2: The Woodbridge Public Library will provide service in modern updated facilities that support the way people work and learn today.

GOAL 3: The Woodbridge Public Library will make it easy and convenient for everyone to interact with and use the library.

GOAL 4: The Woodbridge Public Library will ensure that everyone in the community has ready access to the latest technology and high-speed access to the Internet.

GOAL 5: The Woodbridge Public Library will secure the advocacy, support and financial resources needed to ensure the library’s future.
GOAL ONE:
The Woodbridge Public Library will be a not-to-be missed destination and a point of pride for everyone in the community

OBJECTIVES:

1.1 Woodbridge residents will see the library as a place for personal growth, solutions to everyday challenges, and community engagement.

Possible Action Steps

a. Babies and toddlers
   - De-clutter, expand, and refresh the Children’s Room and create dedicated program space for children at the Main Library.
   - Create new opportunities for families to engage with the library by expanding early literacy and early learning programs.
   - Add new programs geared to children and their parents such as “1000 Books Before Kindergarten”.
   - Launch a Township-wide card registration campaign for preschoolers.

b. School-aged children
   - Engage more school aged children with coding events, book talks, summer reading, and new appealing activities.
   - Create partnerships with the schools to enhance overall childhood literacy and success in school.
   - Greatly expand and promote the Museum Pass Program to provide enrichment opportunities for children and their families.
• Offer new after-school programming that offers a mix of educational support and enrichment, homework help, gaming, clubs, and other programs.

c. **Teens**
• Attract more teens to all library locations with new programs, volunteer opportunities, structured after-school and homework help programs, tutoring, and other enrichment activities to assist in learning and school success.

• Expand and enhance teen programs and collections with dedicated space and staff.

• Create an environment of discovery, creative learning and fun.

• Help students and their families prepare for college.

d. **New English learners**
• Expand offerings for those learning English with formal ESL training, conversation classes, bi-lingual book clubs.

• Increase the print and non-print world language collections in all locations so it reflects the languages spoken in Woodbridge.

• Hire bi-lingual staff.

e. **Entrepreneurs, job seekers and career changers**
• Develop and offer career services assistance, assistance for jobseekers and those interested in starting small businesses.

• Partner with SCORE and other business support resources to offer assistance to entrepreneurs and self-employed.

f. **Working families and older adults**
• Offer more library events at times that allow working families with school age children to participate (nights and weekends).
• Plan and offer learning experiences for older adults with consistent, high-quality programming, including film series, book clubs, discussion groups.

1.2 Residents of all ages will find a current collection of print and digital resources.

Possible Action Steps:

a. Provide more digital content each year, including more streaming video, music, and e-books.

b. Assess the library's print collection, remove damaged and outdated material, replace and refresh content, and continue to reduce collection size in subject areas where digital content provides better information or content is outdated and obsolete.

c. Increase digital and print resources in the world languages represented among Woodbridge's population.

d. Develop a relevant collection development plan based on the evolving needs of the Woodbridge community.

1.3 Woodbridge residents will look to the library for high-quality, engaging community programs and learning opportunities.

Possible Action Steps:

a. Provide a wide variety of programs for people of all ages.

b. Create a full-time program coordinator position to plan and execute programs in all locations.

Goal One Metrics:

• Increase visits to 600,000 annually.
• Increase the number of library card holders to 60,000.
• Increase annual circulation to 700,000.
• Increase program attendance to 35,000.
GOAL TWO:
The Woodbridge Public Library will provide service in modern updated facilities that support the way people work and learn today.

OBJECTIVES

2.1  Develop a long-term capital plan to ensure that all residents have easy access to modern, safe and comfortable library branches.

Possible Action Steps:
  a. Secure funding for a comprehensive Facilities Master Plan that evaluates the functionality of each facility, identifies needed improvements, and targets areas of the community that may be underserved by the current locations.  

  b. Issue a Request for Proposal, solicit responses and choose a provider to create the plan.

  c. Engage a space planner/architect to assess opportunities for renovation of the Main Library and all locations.

  d. Develop a 5-10 year capital plan for the libraries.

2.2:  Make immediate improvements to existing space to accommodate changing community needs.

Possible Action Steps:
  a. Replace the front entrance and ramp to the Main Library.

  b. Restripe and repave all parking lots and explore ways to add more parking spaces.
c. Reduce collection size by removing outdated and infrequently used material, remove stacks, and repurpose space for new uses in all four locations.

d. Create new tutoring, quiet study, and small group meeting spaces at the Main Library in spaces created by stack removal.

e. Remove the periodicals and print service desk along with compact shelving and repurpose this space for study, meeting space or a technology center.

f. Consolidate service desks and rethink public service areas to promote ease of use at all locations.

g. Accommodate individual and community needs for new spaces to meet, collaborate, talk, and work.

h. Create a digital discovery space at all locations with staff who can assist patrons with digital downloads and other apps for their devices.

i. Create a new technology instruction area/lab for everyday training at the Main Library and then a scaled version for the branches.

j. Install additional power outlets in all locations.

k. Reconfigure the interior spaces in all locations to better accommodate technology use and instruction.

**Goal Two Metrics:**
- Create a Facilities Master Plan.
- Implement hi-Impact/low-cost improvements.
GOAL THREE:
The Woodbridge Public Library will make it easy and convenient for everyone to interact with and use the library

OBJECTIVES:

3.1 Increase and change library hours.

Possible Action Steps:

a. Provide full day Saturday hours in all branch locations.

b. Offer year-round Sunday hours at the Main Library.

c. Evaluate the need for additional hours including longer opening hours on Sundays, Friday evening hours, and extended evening hours at the branches.

3.2 Make it easier for cardholders to manage their accounts and communicate with the library.

Possible Action Steps:

a. Use email for courtesy notices for upcoming returns and overdue notices.

b. Evaluate the use of a tool like Bibliocommons to enhance patrons' online experience with the library.

c. Explore the pros and cons of remaining as a standalone ILS vs. joining a consortium based ILS.

d. Add an online payment service.

Goal Three Metrics:

- Library hours expanded and door counts increase.
- ILS enhancements implemented.
- Add technology instruction attendance to statistics.
GOAL FOUR: The Woodbridge Public Library will ensure that everyone in the community has ready access to the latest technology and high-speed access to the Internet

OBJECTIVES:

4.1 Invest in technology resources that support the way that people work.

Possible Action Steps:

a. Implement the recommendations from the 2016-17 Technology Review, especially additional Wi-Fi access points, upgraded Wi-Fi to 300mbps and the addition of new devices and computers for customers.

b. Develop a comprehensive Technology Plan to develop an infrastructure for new resources and mobile devices in all locations.

c. Create a schedule for regular replacement of aging hardware and software for customers and staff.

d. Install self-check systems in all locations.

e. Create a WPL Technology Advisory Council of staff and residents to serve as a “trend spotting” group and advisory board to advise the library about technology issues.
4.2 Provide staffing and technology instruction for library customers of all ages.

Possible Action Steps:

a. Add a technology trainer to staff.

b. Help to close the digital divide in the community by offering increased instruction, more devices and new digital resources.

c. Provide hi-speed, drop-free Wi-Fi access and direct wireless printing from all areas in every location.

d. Build a modern technology instruction lab for everyday use at the Main Library.

e. Develop plans, promote and launch technology-related programs and instruction, tech meet-ups, hackathons and other activities.

f. Provide intensive tech training for all staff members.

g. Revise all staff job descriptions to include the minimum and mandatory tech skills.

Goal Four Metrics:

• Technology Review recommendations are implemented.

• A Technology Plan is written and executed.

• Staff job descriptions have been revised to include technology competencies.

• New tools like Gimlet help inform work priorities.
GOAL FIVE:
The Woodbridge Public Library will secure the advocacy, support and financial resources to ensure its future and develop the best staff and trustees

OBJECTIVES:

5.1 The community will have increased awareness about the library and its value to their lives.

Possible Action Steps:
  a. Use the new strategic plan, vision and mission as a starting point for a conversation about the library’s future.
  
  b. Create a marketing plan and new branding campaign that includes a new logo, new signs and banners at every library location and advertising on buses, billboards, Channel 35, train stations, and retail locations.
  
  c. Build community awareness and involvement through targeted use of social media.
  
  d. Replace the Library’s website with an appealing and easy-to-navigate site.
  
  e. Grow the email database and increase distribution of the weekly email newsletter.

5.2 Develop partnerships and collaborations with others to address issues of importance to the community.

Possible Action Steps:
  a. Position the library as a convener/facilitator for discussions about local and topical issues.
b. Develop the library partnerships with the school district, local businesses, and nonprofits throughout Woodbridge Township.

c. Partner with the Township, Town agencies and Departments and other local organizations in planning and promoting cultural and civic events.

d. Work with local realtors to help boost the attractiveness of Woodbridge as a place to live.

e. Make the WPL a dynamic presence in Woodbridge every day.

f. Continue to support the Friends and institute a plan to build the library foundation.

5.3 **Create a staff team and Board of Trustees that is invested in the community and its success, committed to the library’s vision and mission and eager to lead.**

**Possible Action Steps**

a. Re-engineer library practices: review all existing practices for relevance.

b. Improve internal communication and information sharing with a blog, intranet or other tool that pushes information out to staff at all locations to facilitate learning and sharing new skills.

c. Evaluate and update job descriptions and titles so they accurately reflect the roles and responsibilities associated with each position.

d. Identify skills that are needed at all staff levels to increase everyone's ability to provide great library service and provide training.

e. Create a culture where everyone is allowed and encouraged to try new things.

f. Attract and retain high energy staff; make the Woodbridge Public Library the place where everyone wants to work.

g. Conduct annual staff performance reviews.
h. Institute an annual Board retreat to identify priorities and engage the Trustees in the goals of the library.

i. Plan for frequent staff and trustee development activities.

Goal Five Metrics:
- Increase the email database to include 50,000 addresses.
- Increase the number of social media followers to 12,000 on Facebook, 5,000 on Instagram, and 5,000 on Twitter, and increase the amount of engagement on all.
- Design and use an annual community survey to assess satisfaction with the library.
- Replace/upgrade the library website.
- Launch an annual appeal.
- Increase activity and development of the Friends and Foundation.