

Burnham Library Strategic Plan 2017 - Executive Summary

In order to assess where the Burnham Library is and where it is going, the Board of Trustees developed a strategic plan over the past 12 months. With guidance from a global management consulting executive, we conducted surveys, interviews, focus groups, researched trends, studied best practices, and visited comparable libraries. Over 250 users and non-users participated and the Board, Staff and Friends were all involved in the process.

On a macro level, we ‘relearned’ how important libraries are to the health of a town:

- On a ROI basis, libraries provide more ‘bang for your buck’ than any other town investment (think free videos, books, lectures, tutoring).
- Their physical activity level enlivens the entire town.
- They are the one truly agnostic entity in town, with offerings for all ages and interests. That increases interaction among residents and stakeholders.
- They have transformed themselves into ‘community centers’, processing passports, fostering user created content (podcasts, video stories) exploring local artisan food, beverage and art.

More specific to Bridgewater, a strong theme emerged: residents want the library to be a place that offers more hours and a stronger mix of information and entertainment programming; a spot that can offer the latest technology and also teach residents how to best use it. They want a place that can bring people together, to learn, discuss, connect with each other and exchange ideas.

This dovetails with what we heard people (and town planning documents) want for our town: a more connected Bridgewater.

The Strategic Plan finds that the library fits that role perfectly. It already is a much beloved institution in town. Its architecture, historical archives and staff are second to none. Its usage among residents is proportionally high compared to other towns. All this makes Burnham the ‘natural’ choice to be the hub of a revitalized more connected community.

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But it was also clear that austere financial times have left the library barely keeping up with the tremendous changes in technology and communications. And in this environment, the status quo actually means losing ground.

From these findings, sub-committees were formed, research into other libraries' plans continued, and we targeted 3 areas to focus our resources on:

- Extend hours and add staff (the library will now be open 6 more hours a week, a 20% increase). A new staff member will research grants and donor opportunities.
- Increase Programming (focus on bringing different stakeholders together e.g. a 'cultural feast' with the Bistro; a Land Trust and Library sustainable farming program). This will be coupled with a more aggressive marketing approach.
- Expand access to the latest in technology and communications. Reassess tech needs in infrastructure, hardware and software. Start classes on TV services, blogging, and podcasts. Demonstrate the new world of drones.

And the concurrent pursuit of these three areas synergistically works towards the overriding objective: to make the library a more vital component in a revitalized town.

With several village projects underway, Bridgewater is entering a new exciting phase; one that celebrates our small town heritage and beauty, but keeps up with the cultural and technological changes that swirl around us. It is said that the library represents the DNA of a healthy town. That is why investing in one of the town's most valuable assets now is so important. As someone who knew a little bit about libraries once said:

"A library outranks any other one thing a community can do to benefit its people."

Andrew Carnegie