



**Wethersfield
LIBRARY**

**Strategic Plan
2018-2023**

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INTRODUCTION

In order to meet the changing needs of the Wethersfield community, the Wethersfield Library Board of Directors embarked on a process to re-envision the library and the services it provides.

To that end, the Library Board formed a strategic planning committee and enlisted consultants from Maxine Bleiweis & Associates, a Connecticut-based consulting firm focused on innovative strategic thinking, to provide strategic planning services. What follows is a comprehensive, actionable, and forward-looking strategic plan for 2018-2023.

PLANNING PROCESS

The development of this Strategic Plan involved over 700 members of the Wethersfield community who participated by providing information at focus groups, interviews, and responding to the community survey. Below is a brief description of the process which took place from April – December 2017.

- A series of five **focus groups** were held in June and July 2017. These groups were open to all Wethersfield residents. A total of 53 individuals participated. Five **interviews** with key stakeholders were also conducted.
- An online **survey** was available from May 8 to July 31, 2017. Over 600 individuals completed the survey.
- A **Work Group**, composed of three Board of Directors members, one community member, the library director, and two staff members, met five times to review the community needs assessment, library data, conduct a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, to develop a new mission statement, and to write goals, objectives, and measurements based on selected service priorities.
- **Input from Library staff** was solicited through a staff survey, interviews with several key staff members, and all-staff meetings, including one session focused exclusively on the development of action steps.

THE COMMUNITY

During conversations with a diverse group of community members, a sense that Wethersfield is a town undergoing changes was clearly articulated. Wethersfield is located directly to the south of Connecticut’s capitol city, Hartford, and along major transportation routes. It has experienced population shifts over the past ten years including an increase in racial, ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity. With its claim as the first settled town in Connecticut, Wethersfield feels strong ties to its history and takes pride in its historic district.

The tension between “old” and “new” was evident in **two key issues** that emerged out of the community assessment process.

“Our community is changing in both age, economics and ethnicity. We need to understand this and provide services and environment to accommodate these changes and welcome them.”
Survey participant, age 66-75

First, it is predicted that Wethersfield will continue to face significant demographic change.

Is the Wethersfield community ready to support and meaningfully engage all of its newest residents?

“Make people feel like they live more in a community and not just a town.”
Survey participant, age 26-30

Second, there is a sense of nostalgia for “volunteerism” in the traditional model, and a desire for increased community engagement, ownership, and connections.

How does Wethersfield shift to an open model that engages all segments of the community in different ways?

Community Vision

Based on the information from the community needs assessment, the Strategic Planning Work Group developed a Community Vision statement to guide the library's service priorities for the next five years:

"We seek a vibrant, dynamic, and engaged community where all members welcome each other to participate in civic life. But we face concerns about change and competition for time and attention that keep us from bridging gaps between the past and the present. If we want to reach our aspirations, we need to embrace our evolving community by examining priorities and shifting resources, promoting healthy dialogue and cultural understanding, and being open to exploring new perspectives."

How do we get there?

Wethersfield community leaders and residents shared their thoughts and ideas for how to bring the community to its vision, emphasizing a need for stronger communication, collaboration, the willingness to engage new groups, and having a forward-thinking mindset. The current fiscal environment gives this an additional sense of urgency. As financial resources from the State and Town shrink, all community members and organizations, including the library, will need to be increasingly creative and nimble in offering essential services to residents.

The survey gathered information from residents about how they use the Wethersfield Library, and offered a glimpse into specific demographics – namely people with children under the age of six/stay-at-home parents and those who are self-employed/entrepreneurs. They are the key groups for the library to focus on as patterns of family and employment continue to change.

For example:

- When asked “which services provided by the library are most important to serving the needs of the Wethersfield community as a whole?”, providing access to technology was significantly more likely to be the highest priority for **self-employed/entrepreneur** respondents.
- Respondents with young children are seeking a sense of community at the library. In response to the question above, **stay-at-home parents** selected “offering a community gathering place,” ranked #4 overall, as their second highest priority more than any other group. In addition, in response to the question “How much do you think the Wethersfield Library contributes to the following things in your community?”, **respondents with young children** were significantly more likely to say “a lot” to the option “promoting a sense of community among different groups in your local area.”
- **Both groups** are significantly more likely than other groups to say that programs are “very important” in their personal use of the library.

In addition to understanding how people currently use the library, they shared their aspirations for the Wethersfield Library. The following desires for the library emerged from residents:

- Be **welcoming** to all people and understand and address the barriers that prevent residents from using the library.
- Offer **inspiring** programming that “activates” the community.
- Provide a **comfortable** space, with a “coffee shop or Barnes & Noble feeling”.
- Showcase technology for patron use and **learning**.
- Be a **collaborative** space for learning for all ages.

These themes were echoed by library staff who were also surveyed and interviewed as part of the strategic planning process. Staff look forward to responsive programming, a community gathering space, increased awareness of services, and more focused community outreach.

MISSION STATEMENT

The library's new mission statement, approved by the Board of Directors:

The Wethersfield Library's mission is to provide a welcoming community gathering place with free and open access to resources and experiences that engage the imagination, inspire learning, and promote the exchange of ideas.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Combining community feedback with professional knowledge of best practices in 21st century libraries, goals and objectives were developed. Each objective has a measurement associated with it to ensure that the library is working effectively toward each goal during the next five years. To put these goals and objectives into action, library staff initially identified more than 150 activities to engage, inspire, and enrich the lives of Wethersfield residents, a sampling of which are presented with their associated goal.

The Wethersfield Library's Goals

- Satisfy Curiosity & Stimulate the Imagination
- Support Young Learners and Their Families
- Celebrate Diversity
- Visit a Comfortable Place
- Be an Informed Citizen

GOAL ONE

Satisfy Curiosity & Stimulate Imagination. The Wethersfield community will be supported in their endeavors to foster lifelong learning, creativity, and personal enrichment.

Objectives:

Provide programs, and community-building opportunities based on community needs and strategic initiatives as measured by 1) offering two (2) new programs per year based on community feedback and strategic initiatives, and 2) the number of times staff go out into the community to engage partnerships by the end of one (1) year.

Build and maintain collections that inform, inspire, entertain, and stimulate the imagination as measured by increasing collection turnover by 10% over baseline by the end of three (3) years.

Introduce and support relevant technologies as measured by the increase usage of services related to technology by 10% over baseline by the end of five (5) years.

Increase community awareness of and engagement with library programs, services, resources, and collections as measured by 1) the increase social media and website engagement by 10% over baseline by the end of two (2) years, and 2) the increase in awareness of current offerings based on survey or staff interactions with community members over baseline by the end of two (2) years.

Surprise and delight the community with innovative programs and resources as measured by an increase in first-time program attendees by 10% by the end of three (3) years.

Examples of Year One Activities

- Conduct environmental scan of activities/programs/events in local area for adults and teens
- Re-establish outreach to Executive Square
- Determine which language(s) to support within the collection
- Create space for foreign language(s) collection
- Launch of new website

GOAL TWO

Support Young Learners and Their Families. Wethersfield youth and their families will have the resources they need for success and lifelong learning.

Objectives:

Expand and cultivate opportunities that develop/enhance all types of literacy skills (including early literacy, information literacy, and digital/technological literacy experiences) and foster a love of reading as measured by offering five (5) additional programs per year.

Offer services that support families and the community to develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to support children and teen's learning as measured by offering one (1) related program per year.

Create welcoming and vibrant spaces to encourage active play and hands-on experiential learning to inspire critical and creative thinking as measured by the increase in the amount of time patrons are spending in active play/hands-on learning spaces based on observation by the end of five (5) years.

Examples of Year One Activities

- Update the children's room learning environment
- Implement 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten
- Engage older elementary school children in summer reading

GOAL THREE

Celebrate Diversity. Wethersfield residents will have an awareness, appreciation, and understanding of different cultures within the community.

Objectives:

Provide opportunities for community members to learn about their personal ethnic/religious heritage and the heritage of others in the community as measured by 1) connecting with five (5) groups representing different groups within one (1) year, and 2) Offering two (2) programs per year in years two-five.

Offer programs and resources for community members to learn more about their world/political perspectives as well as the perspectives of others in the community as measured by 1) connecting with two (2) groups representing different groups within one (1) year, and 2) offering one (1) program per year in years two-five.

Create an environment for community members to appreciate and celebrate diverse perspectives, cultures, and values as measured by the increase in community satisfaction based on focus groups at the end of three (3) years.

Examples of Year One Activities

- Connect with existing groups
- Look for ways to further support English conversation class – Time to Talk
- Show selected 2018 Olympic Events
- Show selected 2018 World Cup Soccer
- Link to foreign language newspapers on the website

GOAL FOUR

Visit a Comfortable Place. The Wethersfield community will have a flexible physical space that is adaptable to future uses.

Objectives:

Provide spaces that encourage collaboration and where community based interests can form and thrive as measured by a decrease in the number of times people's space needs for collaboration cannot be accommodated based on public requests and staff planning by the end of three (3) years.

Create spaces that promote self-reflection and focused thought as measured by a decrease in the number of times people's space needs for quiet space cannot be accommodated based on public requests and staff planning by the end of three (3) years.

Provide a welcoming environment for all as measured by an increased sense of welcome by 60% of patrons surveyed by the end of three (3) years.

Examples of Year One Activities

- Library Board to determine whether to move forward with proposed space plan
- Add track lighting for art walls
- Look for ways to further soundproof study and selected meeting rooms
- Explore additional electrical outlets in current Teen area
- Obtain quotes for either new flooring and/or re-carpeting the lower level

GOAL FIVE

Be an Informed Citizen. The Wethersfield Library will play a fundamental role in the democratic process by promoting civic engagement.

Objectives:

The library's resources will be current, relevant, and easily accessible to all as measured by an increase usage of databases/webpages with information by 50% over baseline (TBD) by the end of five (5) years.

Provide opportunities that foster the healthy exchange of ideas as measured by holding two (2) programs in conjunction with other community institutions by the end of three (3) years.

Increase outreach to civic groups as measured by the number of civic groups engaged by the end of five (5) years.

Examples of Year One Activities

- Meet with three new local groups
- Review Meeting Room Policy
- Review Bulletin Board and Handouts Policy
- Perform collection maintenance of the ready-reference and reference sections

KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

In order to meet the community's aspirations for the Wethersfield Library, four foundational issues that impact each of the plan's goals and objectives need to be addressed: space reconfiguration, communication and outreach, collection assessment, and staff training and alignment.

Space reconfiguration. A community member's desire for communal learning opportunities at a public library should ideally be realized before patrons approach the library doors. The Wethersfield Library has an opportunity to beckon people from the busy Silas Deane Highway into a place of discovery by outside enticement. Once inside, the patrons should be greeted by dynamic activity accompanied by traditional resources of books, magazines, and videos. The dynamic activity could include a café setting, a visual invitation to continue entering the spaces toward a place of discovery for children and families downstairs or to quiet areas in the upper level. The desired influx of middle schoolers after school should be enhanced by an updated teen area as currently proposed. Utilizing express or self-services for patrons would free staff to work directly with patrons and allow barriers such as large service desks to be diminished.

Outreach & communication. As the Wethersfield Library changes focus and prepares to invite new populations into the space, it is paramount that these changes are first communicated among the staff, board, and town departments and then to the general public. Establishing ambassadors to each segment of the population would create a word-of-mouth, trusted network to spread the word and also allow new partnerships to form. The use of whatever communications channels each population segment uses should be noted and adapted for the situation. In addition, a survey of staff and others close to the new populations could uncover expertise by those new community members in various forms of social media that would enhance new communications channels.

Collection assessment. In order to create the proper space for operating within a defined footprint, the square footage taken up by physical collections of books, videos, music, etc., has to be thoroughly reexamined. A hard look at what circulates, what is requested and not owned, and how the items are selected are all essential to this strategy. Assistance with popular selections often comes from including the most knowledgeable patrons in the process, scanning the popular literature, and watching for local trends and patterns. A high "turnover" rate of materials assures that space does not have to be allocated for the items, when a large percentage of the items are

out in circulation. Special assistance is often required to develop collections of materials in other languages as identified to round out the collection.

Staff training and alignment. At a time of tight budgets and cost controls, often the first item to be sacrificed is staff training. This practice is counterproductive to keeping up with new trends, new technology, and new ways to accomplish tasks in a more cost-effective way. Change happens more quickly when staff are introduced to new methods.

Similarly, the organizational charts of public libraries have been static even in the face of change. A step back and an analysis of how the goals and objectives will be accomplished and by whom is likely to illustrate what the organizational alignments should be and adjustments can be made accordingly. For instance, if community outreach is identified as key, either a staff position should reflect that as a main responsibility or a cross-functional team should be created to undertake the tasks associated with those objectives.

Strategic Planning Work Group

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