

# **Brooks Memorial Library Strategic Plan 2017-2021**

## **Proud of Our Past Striding Forward into the Future**

### **Our Vision:**

*The Vision of Brooks Memorial Library is that all members of the community engage with the library to spark curiosity, enrich lives, and achieve aspirations*

### **Our Mission:**

The mission of the Brooks Memorial Library is to connect people and resources to inspire, inform, and empower our diverse community. In order to accomplish this mission, the library:

- Provides free and open access to materials, resources, and tools to advance individual and collective exploration.
- Convenes conversations and encourages collaborations and connections among leaders, organizations, and individuals.
- Offers cultural and educational opportunities and experiences through programs, meetings, and exhibits within the library space and in other venues.

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- I. Survey Questions and Responses
- II. Summary of Themes in Survey Response Comments
- III. List of State Priorities

## **From the Chair of the BML Strategic Planning Committee**

Welcome to the Brooks Memorial Library's new Strategic Plan which will guide us for the years 2017-2021. As we celebrate fifty years in this building, it is indeed a time of major change including our new Library Director Starr LaTronica, our enhanced financial position thanks to generations of community benefactors, Ronald Read, and our recent eye-catching physical enhancements. Brooks Memorial Library has a long and distinguished history in our community and it will continue to serve the community as it has in the past.

The Strategic Planning Committee has been hard at work since the last months of 2015, when under Jerry Carbone, the members began to educate themselves regarding the details of the planning process. After welcoming Starr LaTronica to the directorship, they began planning by consulting the Staff, Trustees, Friends, and volunteers. This process considered Strengths, Opportunities, Achievements, and Results (SOAR), and provided the baseline from which the Committee began to consult the wider community.

"Community Conversations" took place at the library and were followed by requests for preferences and opinions regarding the library. An online survey was launched, and paper surveys were taken into the community to venues such as Gallery Walk, supermarkets, and neighborhood gatherings.

The results of the Committee's work are to be found in this plan. The document itself is not voluminous, consisting of the initial Vision and Mission statements, and the seven Service Priorities. However, the activities and commitment involved in carrying out these priorities are indeed immense, and wonderfully so.

I would like to thank the Strategic Planning Committee, Amy Howlett of the Springfield, VT library, formerly of the Vermont Department of Libraries, and all others who helped along the way: Staff, Trustees, Friends, volunteers, and patrons, as well as all who took the time to fill out the survey and/or attend a forum. As always, charting our course is an exciting endeavor, and we look forward to fulfilling our intentions.

Jane Southworth, Chair  
Strategic Planning Committee

## Thanks and Acknowledgements

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Emma Lann, Volunteer  
Bob Oeser, Volunteer  
Community Conversation Attendees  
Our Survey Participants  
*Brattleboro Reformer*  
*Brattleboro Commons*  
*BCTV*  
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Lindsay Bellville  
Connie Bresnahan  
Howard Burrows  
Jennifer Lann  
Starr LaTronica  
Elizabeth Tannenbaum  
Susan Troy  
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## Executive Summary

The Strategic Planning Committee of Brooks Memorial Library (BML) began its work in the fall of 2015 by meeting with retiring library director Jerry Carbone to discuss the process and determine how to proceed. It was decided to wait for formal planning to begin until our new library director, Starr LaTronica, had begun work. In the early spring of 2016, we held an in-house discussion of where we are and where we want to go. In this process, facilitated by Amy Howlett, (then with the Vermont Department of Libraries), Staff, Trustees, Friends, and volunteers came together to discuss our Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results (SOAR). It was a wide ranging and very fruitful time.

We then reached out to the wider community, holding two Community Conversations facilitated by Starr LaTronica. Even wider consultation was provided by the online and paper surveys, which were also taken into the community through tabling at various venues and events.

After reviewing the results of our consultations, we chose our enhanced seven “Service Priorities” from the list suggested by the Vermont Department of Libraries. The statements in these Priorities form the basis of our Plan, and are elaborated by the actions for each. The process of selecting the Priorities and articulating the actions was completed in early 2017, almost a year after we had begun.

Members of the Committee wrestled with their desires to do more and more within the library itself as well as in the larger community, but were limited by the reality that our budgets would only allow the library to do so much.

The Service Priorities we have chosen continue with many of the same themes as in the past since these priorities continue to be fundamental to us and our patrons. This year, we have seven priorities, as so many considerations seem important and demand their own categories. In this plan, we have retained some priorities (with a few alterations) as well as adding entirely new ones.

We maintained our first priority, which supports life-long learning. Libraries have traditionally been seen as a place to explore new worlds and enhance the skills of learners. In this plan, this role is expanded, focusing on both library collections and programs. We will seek help from our users to enhance our collections, make interlibrary loan even better, explore ways to enable more people in the community to become aware of what we offer, and encourage our users to contribute suggestions in the realm of collection development.

Another of the previous plan’s priorities focused on young readers. In this plan, we have continued that commitment, but have expanded our attention to young *learners* to encompass a broad approach to meeting the wide range of developmental and educational needs and interests of this age group. In addition, we have added a priority focused specifically on patrons between ages 13 and 19. The youth services librarians are continually offering creative ways to provide new programs and to enhance user experiences.

We continue to focus on enhancing both physical and virtual spaces. So many people use the library for small group activities that we have found ways to make more space available for them. We are also working to help patrons engage with the library in an increasingly digital and mobile world.

A new priority was added to help patrons navigate more effectively in the interconnected world of digital technology. A great deal of discussion in our committee centered on how best to provide understanding of and assistance with emerging technologies.

The library's participation in the community has emerged as a newly important priority. We strive to bring new users into the library, and we go out into the community and partner with other organizations to enhance and strengthen the community and all its members. BML is established as an esteemed place in this community, and we recognize and welcome the opportunity to evolve into an expanded, essential community presence through outreach, collaboration, and civic engagement.

Finally, the topic of information literacy remains a priority for library staff. As the amount of information in the world proliferates enormously, our understanding of how to evaluate it must keep pace.

### **Service Priorities 2017-2021**

1. Stimulate the imagination of library users, and support life-long learning through assistance, resources, and programming for reading, contemplating, viewing, listening, and conversing.
2. Engage the community through outreach, awareness, and collaboration.
3. Support young learners from early literacy on.
4. Empower teens by providing materials, resources, and programming for education, entertainment, and engagement.
5. Provide welcoming physical and virtual spaces for library users.
6. Foster technological understanding and confident, creative participation in an interconnected world.
7. Develop information literacy in library users of all ages, so that they may find and evaluate information, think critically, and make decisions based on reliable information.

# **The Plan to Achieve our Mission: Service Priorities and Actions 2017-2021**

With every public document, plan, or statement of intentions, there are many words of explanation, history, gratitude, and usually many appendices. This section, the ripe fruit of two years of ongoing planning, talk, meetings, considerations, writing, and research, is, as the saying goes, “where the rubber meets the road.”

It is to these priorities and actions that we will turn regularly as we consider what to do next, evaluate our progress, and decide where to make changes. To achieve the Brooks Memorial Library (BML) vision and mission, the Staff, Trustees, and Friends of Brooks Memorial Library will use the following service priorities and associated actions as their guiding document for the years 2017-2021.

## **1. Stimulate the imagination of library users, and support life-long learning through assistance, resources, and programming for reading, contemplating, viewing, listening, and conversing.**

- a. Engage members of the community for input on collection development and programming choices.
- b. Provide a collection of contemporary and classic works that meet and expand the interests of the community. Classify and catalogue materials locally to ensure effective access for patrons.
- c. Provide expanded access to materials far beyond the BML collection through the Catamount Library Network, and through interlibrary loan. Cooperate with other Vermont libraries and the Vermont Department of Libraries to improve resource sharing through courier services and catalog/resource sharing software.
- d. Regularly promote the opportunities and possibilities offered by the library for broad community awareness.
- e. Engage the arts community to create a vibrant art presence in the library.
- f. Expand displays and tools to help patrons find and share favorite books, movies, and audio.

## **2. Engage the community through awareness and collaboration.**

- a. Convene community conversations to promote civic discourse.
- b. Partner with agencies, organizations, and individuals to provide a broad spectrum of educational, recreational, and cultural programs and opportunities for all ages.
- c. Establish a database of local resources across agencies, organizations, and individuals.
- d. Provide a community “hub” bulletin board space for patrons to post messages, business cards, events, services.

### **3. Support young readers from early literacy on.**

- a. Implement a “1000 books before kindergarten” program.
- b. Offer a weekly “lapsit” program for age newborn through 18 months.
- c. Color code books in the EASY book section to help parents and children find books for their reading level.
- d. Overhaul the nonfiction section by weeding outdated and underutilized titles; reallocate shelf space by identifying subject areas which need additional titles and subject areas which reflect current demand and use patterns.
- e. Purchase new titles to satisfy identified needs.

### **4. Empower teens by providing materials, resources, and programming for education, entertainment, and engagement.**

- a. Assess and develop the Young Adult Collection.
- b. Involve teens in planning programs and suggesting materials and resources they would like BML to offer.
- c. Have a contest to name the new YA Room culminating in an official grand opening of the space.

### **5. Provide welcoming physical and virtual spaces for library users.**

- a. Provide a variety of comfortable spaces for reading, working, and relaxing; *quiet* spaces for reading and study; space for people to interact without interrupting others; small meeting rooms for public use, including tutoring; and a space for snacks and beverages.
- b. Offer designated space and resources to conduct research on local history and genealogy.
- c. Supply space for innovative uses of old and new technology for creative pursuits.
- d. Construct and enhance physical space dedicated to preserving, cataloging, and displaying the library’s fine arts collection.
- e. Redesign the BML website for easy navigation by the public and easy maintenance by staff on a wide variety of computers and mobile devices.
- f. Institute policies and explore efforts to ensure access and diminish barriers.
- g. Extend friendly, respectful, efficient, and precise customer services to all populations.
- h. Seek opportunities to provide experiences and resources in a variety of community locations and on a variety of electronic platforms.
- i. Provide clean, accessible, and updated restrooms.
- j. Strive to ensure better physical accessibility for all in the library’s physical and virtual spaces.

**6. Foster technological understanding and confident, creative participation in an interconnected world.**

- a. Provide assistance with and access to current and emerging technologies on public and personal devices.
- b. Launch a technology program series for the public.
- c. Expand public access computing with new laptops and workstations in renovated space.
- d. Create technology-focused guides to help patrons increase their knowledge of digital tools in the library and beyond.
- e. Expand technology training for staff development.
- f. Improve website design to help patrons understand the differences among the library's various digital services and alert them to the privacy policies of those services.
- g. Explore the feasibility of acquiring library cards and registering for programs online.
- h. Develop best practices for maintaining and staying up to date with hardware, software, and networking for both staff and public.
- i. Integrate the library's technology with the Town of Brattleboro's technology plan.

**7. Develop information literacy in library users of all ages, so that they may find and evaluate information, think critically, and make decisions based on reliable information.**

- a. Provide continuing education to keep staff current regarding information literacy.
- b. Offer public programs for all ages on information literacy topics such as protecting digital privacy and assessing quality of information.
- c. Create guides in various formats, such as posters, web pages, and pamphlets, to help patrons develop information literacy skills.
- d. Review the library's privacy policies and practices and make them as transparent as possible to users, including information about the policies of third-party digital services, such as downloadable e-books and streaming video.

## **Appendix I**

### **Creating the New Plan: The Planning Process**

The State of Vermont Department of Libraries in its document *Minimum Standards for Vermont Public Libraries 1998* (the most recent version), states as Standard 7, that “Vermont public libraries [should] have long range plans that articulate their philosophies for serving their communities and outline specific means for achieving results.” Typically, these plans are five-year plans, with progress towards achieving their goals being evaluated every year by the library’s Strategic Planning Committee and Board of Trustees.

#### **A. Overview of Our Process**

Brattleboro’s Brooks Memorial Library Strategic Planning Committee followed a process recommended by the state Department of Libraries, entitled “SOAR” (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) and utilized the consulting services of Amy Howlett, a regional state librarian. We began in 2015 with a review of the last plan, and progress made on achieving its goals, and also met with the Buildings and Grounds committee to consider how the physical upgrade of the building could align with the planning goals, past and future. The Planning Committee then began the planning process on its own. Following is a brief review and timeline of activities and topics discussed by the Committee:

- September 2015: Met with Amy Howlett to consider the planning process.
- October 2015: Met to discuss the *Aspen Report* on public libraries.<sup>1</sup>
- November 2015: Continued discussion of the Aspen Report and how to structure information gathering in the community.
- December 2015: Held further discussion of data gathering focusing on possible survey questions to ask.
- February 2016: Welcomed new library director Starr LaTronica and began to make the planning process concrete, developing a list of people in the community to consult.
- March 2016: Discussed and finalized the planning process, held a facilitated planning retreat for Staff, Trustees and Friends.
- April 2016: Made final plans for two community conversations with community representatives.
- May 2016: Held two community conversations, Starr LaTronica facilitating.
- June, July, and August 2016: Launched the library survey online and on paper in the library. Surveys were taken into the community to various locations to seek

<sup>1</sup> *The Aspen Report* (Amy K. Garmer, *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*, October 2014. A wide-ranging document focusing on changes libraries can make in the age of information plenty. The report states (p. iv): “Economic, educational, civic and social opportunities are tied to a whole new set of knowledge and skills that barely existed a generation ago, and people without these skills or access to this information abundance are quickly left behind. Public libraries can be at the center of these changes: a trusted community resource and an essential platform for learning, creativity and innovation in the community.”

out input in new places. Starr visited many local organizations to discuss the library and invite input.

- September 2016: Began to review and summarize information received from surveys, visits, and conversations.
- October 2016: Continued to review the survey results, both numeric and written.
- November – February 2017: Used the results of the surveys and other input from the community to choose seven “Service Responses” from the State Library’s list, and began to assemble several action items for each.
- March 2017: Finalized Responses and related actions. Compiled Plan Report document, to be presented to Trustees and Town.

## **B. Hearing from the Library Insiders and the Community Outside**

In March of 2016, the library was closed for a morning while Amy Howlett of the State Department of Libraries led the assembled Staff, Trustees, and Friends through a SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) analysis. Small groups considered each topic and reported back. This was a chance for the volunteer trustees to hear from the professional staff many of the details of their work lives.

**Strengths:** Groups noted that we are a model library-knowledgeable, welcoming, professional, with excellent reference services; a world class cataloguer. Staff are skilled at the work required to keep all the materials circulating. Staff provide excellent programs which are well attended. Our volunteers are a magnificent resource.

**Opportunities:** This category of discussion focused on problems and needs as opportunities. The groups responded by mentioning technology issues many times, added a desire for more out-reach, and on-going training. A list of possible ways to find new patrons included community events, kiosks, displays, parking ease, and outreach to seniors.

**Aspirations:** We dreamed of being an integral part of our artistic community, welcoming everyone, moving forward while remaining relevant, increasing number of patrons, being important in all parts of their lives, growing the number of groups using the library, and being known as outstanding by other libraries.

**Results:** How do we know that we are succeeding in what we have chosen to do? The attendees listed increased staff skills and training, salaries, clarification of job descriptions, smiling patrons, increased financial support, more library cards, and increased circulation.

Many of the items that surfaced in this original in-house discussion were, not surprisingly, mentioned again and again as we heard from members of the community.

## **C. Community Conversations**

After the SOAR Analysis by Staff, Friends, and Trustees, we initiated our information gathering time. We began by inviting many people and groups representing different interests in the town

to two days of Community Conversations within the library. These were facilitated by Starr LaTronica and were held on the evening of May 19, 2017, and on the afternoon of May 23, 2017. A list of people and groups invited/participating can be found in “Attachment II.” At each gathering, the following questions were posed to the group by Starr:

- What do you and your constituency enjoy doing?
- What would you and your constituency enjoy if the opportunity were available?
- What do you/your constituency need?
- What kind of community do you/your constituency want to live in?
- What needs to change?

A full list of the ideas generated will be found at the end of this section. The big “themes” that emerged are as follows:

- **Brattleboro library users love their library!**
- Library as a hub for local groups to share resources
- Basic adult literacy with technology and mentorship
- Sustainability: green living, living wage, etc
- Mentoring, education, intergenerational activities
- Interaction among age groups, visitors and locals
- Transportation and parking
- Support for less fortunate, sharing of wealth
- School/library involvement
- Social Justice
- Connecting with marginal populations
- Commitment to equity
- Belief in power of change
- Concern for intergenerational welfare
- Unique town where people love to live

#### **D. Hearing from the Community at Large: Surveys and Outreach**

As noted above, the months of the summer and early fall were spent seeking input from the community in varying ways, and then evaluating the responses we received. A full copy of the survey and responses is located in “Attachment I.” We asked for input in the “short answer survey” about the topics of technology, services, buildings, children and young adults, and the community at large. In the narrative portion of the survey, we were more personal, asking the responders to indicate favorite things about the library and new things desired. We requested their thoughts about libraries in general and about themselves, if they wanted to share that data.

Surveys were available on the library website and in paper version at the library. Additionally, the surveys were taken out into the community to Gallery Walk (twice), the Brattleboro Food Co-op, Price Chopper, Brattleboro Union High School, and various other locations in the community. All paper copy responses were entered into the computer survey.

The following items were most important to respondents:

### **Technology**

- Finding and evaluating information
- Downloadable content
- Access to online resources

### **Services**

- Assistance in research and finding information
- Cultural programs to support lifelong learning

### **Building**

- Comfortable spaces for reading, working, and relaxing
- Quiet spaces for study
- Small meeting rooms for public use

### **Children and young adults**

- Early literacy programs for preschool children
- Activities for school-age children
- Activities for teens

### **Community**

- “Community Catalogue” of local and regional resources
- Partnerships with local organizations and agencies for outreach

When people had an opportunity to offer individual, longer comments, a wide range of items appeared. They are included in “Attachments,” but a few quotations have been included here:

“The website is as important as the building now.”

“I love print media, but the library being as up to date and relevant as possible techwise is so important to the broader community.”

“It’s weird that you ask more about technology than about books. I feel the book collection should be expanded and updated, this is more important than technology.”

“The benefit of a library to the community can be greater than the sum of its parts. The library is a melting pot of people who use its services. For some people who are homeless

or impoverished or marginalized by social or mental differences, the library can be a huge resource that provides connection and dignity...”

“A renewed (library) presence in West Brattleboro would be welcomed.”

“Maybe a bookmobile to the hospitals and rehab centers, or any place where the residents cannot get to the library on their own.”

“A library should first and foremost promote literacy.”

“I am old, but I believe we need to invest in the children.”

“The staff is one of my favorite ‘things.’ (The best things in life aren’t things!)”

## **E. Finding the Essence: Choosing Our Goals and Actions**

In its recommended planning process, the State of Vermont provides a series of “Service Responses” from which libraries can choose to use as their focus in creating their five year plan. These are abstract and allow for the development of specific, often measurable action items for each Response. A copy of the current state list is attached. In addition to choosing the Responses and deciding on accompanying actions, the committee looked closely at our Vision and Mission statements.

## **Appendix II**

### **Brooks Memorial Library: Its Proud History and Accomplishments to Date**

#### **A. Our Journey to the Present**

Brattleboro has had a library for over 160 years. Originally a collection of books was owned by a library association and was housed in various places in town. In 1882, the Town Brattleboro Library Association formally transferred its holdings to the Town, which formed the Brattleboro Free Library. Then, in 1887, George J. Brooks who had grown up in nearby Chesterfield, NH, and made his fortune on the West Coast, returned to the area and donated money to build a new library building. At that time, the library became the Brooks Memorial Library. In 1967, the existing library building was torn down and the library acquired a new home in its present building, funded in part by the town and in part by donations. It is important to note here that, in Vermont, municipalities get no direct state monetary support for libraries; however, services provided by the State's Department of Libraries are an indirect form of support.

#### **B. The Community Surrounding and Using Brooks Memorial Library**

Brattleboro is a community with a long history, a vibrant arts community, and a paradoxically large set of problems. A mélange of information about the community from the town plan is summarized below.

Brattleboro was founded in 1753, and is located on the Connecticut River. It was a major agricultural and manufacturing community during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is the first place of exit going North on the interstate. Currently, its population is about 12,000 people which has not varied greatly in the past 60 years. The population is aging, with the share of working age adults declining. The housing for our population is also aging, with almost fifty percent of housing units constructed before 1950. Approximately half of the housing in the community is rental housing. Unfortunately, poverty is increasing in Brattleboro, with 18 percent of children under age 8 in poverty, while two-thirds of the elementary school children receive free or reduced price lunch. It has also been estimated that there are over 200 homeless individuals in Windham County, with approximately 25-80 possibly located in Brattleboro.

Other demographic items of interest as noted in the *Brattleboro Town Plan, 2013* are:

- The median household income in Brattleboro is below the state median income.
- Brattleboro has a higher poverty rate than the state's, with 13.1 percent of people below the poverty line in the 2000 census.
- Approximately 90 percent of residents have a high school diploma, while over 34 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher.
- In 2010, Brattleboro's population was 92 percent white, 2.2 percent Asian, and 1.9 percent African-American.

It is in taking note of the above statistics that, as part of the planning process, the Library Staff and Trustees have been discussing ways to find and serve the people who are not traditionally

library users. The library is also used by many people from neighboring communities who have purchased cards.

While the Brattleboro Town Plan has only two Actions proposed that relate to the library (enrich the collection and maximize fiber optic resources), it seems possible from the information about Brattleboro listed above that the library could be a significant resource to the Town as it seeks to pursue both economic development and its Plan Actions in fields of education, economic job development, information policies, and arts and cultural activities.

### C. Heading into the Future

The table below indicates significant change and growth over the years. Now, with digital devices changing the way that information is gathered and delivered, the library has responded in new ways. But libraries and librarians are always responding to change and trying to serve more people. More than a quarter century ago, in 1974, BML librarian Eva Leech, said, *“From the beginning, every librarian has tried to reach more people (as we are today), to find new forms of service (as we are today), and to maintain the high standards set by our predecessors (as we are today).”* Recently, retired librarian Jerry Carbone commented in a town report about his efforts to “...make Brooks a dynamic, forward-thinking, and caring institution.” Current staff recognizes that for the library to be the heart of the community, the community must be the heart of the library. The future requires that we move beyond access to engagement, to invite patron participation as our most important partnership of all.

These are the reasons that residents of Brattleboro have valued their library for over 150 years.

### D. Brooks Memorial Library by the Numbers

<b>Table 1. Recent Statistics from Brooks Records</b>						
<b>Year</b>	<b>Books in Library</b>	<b>Non-Print Media</b>	<b>Total Circulation</b>	<b>Registered Borrowers</b>	<b>Reference Questions</b>	<b>Volunteer Hours</b>
<b>2000</b>	69,320	6,521	167,752	13,764	14,436	2,102
<b>2005</b>	70,016	6,310	185,589	7,873	19,673	2,749
<b>2010</b>	72,770	6,601	176,362	9,886	18,912	3,254
<b>2015</b>	74,628	5,740	180,580	10,941	16,728	3,008

**Table 2. Brooks Memorial Library in comparison to other towns in Vermont with population of more than 5000**

(Brattleboro ranks 9<sup>th</sup> in population in that group of towns.)

*2013-2014 State of Vermont Library Statistics*

<b>Item</b>	<b>Brooks' numbers</b>	<b>Rank among towns</b>
<b>Total Staff (FTE)</b>	10.29	4
<b>Volunteer Hours/Week</b>	62	5
<b>Total Books Owned</b>	74,771	2
<b>Registered Borrowers</b>	10,778	3
<b>Reference Questions</b>	15,392	5
<b>Total Circulation</b>	173,004	4
<b>Total Programs (Adult &amp; Juvenile)</b>	534	7
<b>Patrons Trained on Electronic Devices</b>	10,221	1