

White Plains Public Library Strategic Plan: 2012-2015

Executive Summary

The White Plains Public Library engaged in a strategic planning process in spring 2012 to produce goals that would guide the library through 2015. A key outcome of the plan is to help determine the direction of the design development of the Library's main floor. The process involved an environmental scan that aggregated information about White Plains as well as the library, information and publishing industries. The strategic plan has three goals: to make the Library an inviting and welcoming organization; to engage and develop teens; and to create a Learning Commons for adults.

Introduction

A strategic plan is essential for any public library; in fact, an up-to-date, long-range plan is one of the minimum standards for public libraries in New York State (<http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/ministan.htm>).

But today, strategic planning for public libraries takes on a special urgency as the environment in which public libraries operate continues to undergo rapid change.

A large part of this is due to technology, specifically the growth in digital content—from ebooks to streaming media—and the ready access to the Internet, especially through handheld devices, like smartphones.

Community needs and expectations are likewise shifting. Demographic changes, especially increases in immigration, require a range of responses from libraries, including help with English language learning. More than ever, young families look to the library for help in developing their pre-school children, and support as these children progress through their school years. Baby boomers seek information to reinvent the idea of retirement or help with health issues for themselves or their aged parents.

While adults have a range of life-long learning needs, as a result of the economic recession many adults continue to seek information and learning opportunities relating to education, careers, and job seeking. Adults also want to improve their technology skills, whether to remain viable in the workplace or to support their own interests. Personal growth, pleasure from reading, creative inspiration, and entertainment continue to be strong drivers of library use.

Consumer behavior is also changing what users expect from the library. Customers want to conduct many of their transactions online, but also want traditional facilities that enable social interaction and the experience of community. They want the freedom, speed and anonymity that come from self-service while still having ready access to in-person assistance.

Finally, as a result of the economic downturn, local funding for public libraries has declined or, at best, remained steady (while health care and retirement continue to absorb more and more of the library budget.) This means that libraries must be committed to ongoing analysis of their communities' needs, unrelenting in aligning resources to meet those needs, open to new service models and ways of "doing business," and clear and transparent about the process.

The Planning Process

The strategic planning process began in January 2012. Three factors initiated the process. One, the existing strategic plan was seven years old and needed to be replaced.

Also, both a new director and assistant director joined the Library in fall 2011; the strategic planning process was an important vehicle for them to learn more about the White Plains community and a deeper understanding of the library's services.

Finally, the Library began the development of a Master Plan to re-envision public service on the first floor—over two-thirds of the Library's public space—in 2010. Key elements in this plan were the creation of The Edge, a space for teens, as well as reinventing the library for adults.

Library management felt that it was essential that a strategic plan—the vision for the library's future—should drive the design of the first floor. Our building needs to support the programs and services the library would want to provide in the future.

By necessity, this planning process needed to be efficient and low-cost—no funds had been budgeted for a strategic plan. Library staff conducted most of the work; Library Strategies, a consulting group from The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, was retained to consult on the process, facilitate a retreat, and advise on the final plan.

The process also needed to be fast. The design development phase for the Master Plan, which would produce the final documents for the renovation, was scheduled to end July 2012. For the strategic plan to inform the master plan, we needed our ideas to coalesce by May.

Where once institutions developed long-range plans meant to last for years, that is no longer good practice; for libraries, too many factors—most notably technology—can upend a long-range plan. This strategic plan is meant to support the Library through 2015, the same year the building renovation will be completed.

From January through March 2012, Library staff conducted a dozen focus groups with adults, parents, and teens. This research expands and updates the knowledge

gained through the design charrettes held in November and December of 2010 by Bermello Ajamil/VITETTA, the Library's architects.

The 2012 focus groups, which ranged from four to 10 participants, were conducted at the Library as well as offsite, involved Library users and non-users, immigrants and long-time residents. In addition, Library staff interviewed another 20 key individuals.

We conducted an environmental scan, collecting data about White Plains, the Library and the national trends having an impact on libraries, publishing and the information industry. We consulted reports from leading organizations such as OCLC, Inc., the Pew Research Center, Macarthur Foundation, and the Berkman Center for Internet & Society.

White Plains librarians visited other library facilities, including the New Rochelle, Greenburgh and Mamaroneck libraries in Westchester and the Middle Country Library, Centereach and Selden, New York. Library Director Brian Kenney and Teen Librarian Erik Carlson visited the Chicago Public Library's teen space YOUmedia to determine if this was a viable model for White Plains.

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On May 4th, the Library held a half-day planning retreat. Fifty participants—selected officials, leaders from the not-for-profit and business communities, staff, library users—spent the morning discussing “game-changers,” issues that are having an impact on individual lives as well as the community at large, then brainstormed about how the Library can respond to these challenges. This event was the single most important factor in developing the strategic plan.

In August, the Library's management team will work with Library Strategies to determine how we can realize the goals. This will involve creating actions for each of the strategies, assigning responsibility for each action, developing a timeline for implementation, and determining the measures to evaluate success. Key to the process will be to determine the strategic plan's impact on other Library operations.

What this Strategic Plan Is—and Isn't

This strategic plan is meant to be truly *strategic*—it is focused exclusively on the most important goals that the Library needs to achieve in the next three years. These goals are new, or renewed, directions for the Library, and for the Library to achieve them will take significant organizational focus and allocation of resources.

This plan is not as comprehensive as our Mission Statement (Appendix A), although it supports several of the actions of the Mission Statement. Nor does it address some of the most important Library activities, especially services to children and families.

The White Plains Public Library opened the Trove, a library for children, in 2005. By any measure, this facility and, more importantly, the programs and services offered

by the Trove staff, are hugely successful. Parents interviewed as part of the planning process were unanimous in their praise for the Trove.

Clearly the Trove will be an important part of the Library's mission over the next three years, and we will continue to seek funding to expand the Trove's services. However, the work of the Trove will not change significantly.

When this strategic plan sunsets, the Trove will be celebrating its tenth anniversary. In our next planning process, we will focus on service to children and families as we prepare the Trove to develop new generations of White Plains children.

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Strategic Plan: Goals and Strategies 2012-2015

Goal #1: The Library is an Inviting and Welcoming Organization

Strategies: Create a facility that is attractive and comfortable, supports multiple activities, and will be a desirable destination for White Plains residents.

Adopt a Customer Service Policy that places the experience of our customers at the center of the Library.

Create an exterior presence that clearly signals to the community that this is a dynamic, welcoming, public library.

Revitalize our public relations efforts to attract new user groups.

Goal #2 The Library Engages and Develops Teens

Strategies: Create The Edge—both a physical space and a new plan of service—that will provide teens with access to state-of-the-art technology and opportunities for self-exploration and skill building through digital content creation.

Provide teens with an understanding of the modes of communications that comprise the new media landscape and the tools used to create digital content.

Help teens develop critical thinking skills and information literacy.

Guide teens to develop a core set of values that will allow them to become responsible digital citizens.

Goal #3: The Library will be a Learning Commons for Adults

Strategies: Bring together the expertise of our staff, educational institutions, social service organizations, professional associations, governmental agencies, and individual experts to facilitate learning and the free exchange of ideas.

Create a physical Learning Commons to support adult learning, including easy access to assistance; space for quiet study and group learning; enhanced hardware and software; space for instruction and workshops.

Develop programming, instruction, and networking opportunities in five key areas: reading, writing, and Literature; English and citizenship; technology; life transition points (education, career, finances, retirement); and small business growth and economic development.

Appendix A: Mission Statement

Mission

The White Plains Public Library is a dynamic, civic resource with the mission of enabling all members of the community to engage in lifelong learning, find inspiration and build citizenship. The Library provides free and open access to recorded knowledge, personal guidance in its use and diverse opportunities for cultural exchange and exploration of ideas.

Through the planning and action of the staff and Trustees, the Library will:

Play a vigorous role in the life of the City by serving as a center for informational, educational, cultural and recreational enrichment;

Encourage full public use of the total range of library services;

Provide the greatest possible public access through hours of service and other means of service delivery;

Employ qualified, skilled and resourceful personnel able to make the services of the Library responsive to the needs of the citizenry;

Offer an up-to-date collection of books, magazines, other print and non-book materials and online resources that are carefully selected, systematically arranged, and aggressively promoted;

Carry out its program of services in a comfortable, attractive, and safe Library building and grounds.

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