

The Cyrenius H. Booth Library



Strategic Plan
2016-2019

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Introduction

In an effort to more deeply understand and respond to the Newtown community, the Cyrenius H. Booth Library Board of Trustees and library staff embarked on a strategic planning process in 2016. New leadership and membership on the Board of Trustees, as well as a new Library Director, positioned the organization for a fresh look at the library's ability to meet community needs.

The Cyrenius H. Booth Library was the result of a posthumous gift of Newtown's benefactress, Mary Elizabeth Hawley. The library opened on December 17, 1932 with a capacity for 25,000 volumes. It was considered one of the most modern libraries of its time, containing features that are missing from many libraries even today. It was completely fire proof and its rooms were constructed with cork floors and acoustic ceiling tiles to deaden sound. The building also had a built-in humidifying unit and a centralized vacuum cleaner. Miss Hawley, in addition to donating money for the construction of the building, left a quarter of a million dollar trust to generate operating revenues from the interest it earned. This trust provided the funding for the library until the early 1980s, when taxpayer support began. In the summer of 1996, the library began construction of an addition to the rear of the original building that would double the available floor space. The ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new addition took place January 11, 1998.

Today, the library staff continue to welcome Newtown's citizens through the entrance doors and online with a wide range of services and resources. The library seeks to serve its residents by offering a diverse set of programs and resources. These include eBook downloads, assistance in the use of an extensive genealogy collection, space for entrepreneurs to network with one another and grow their businesses, and early literacy learning through song and movement. Visitors to the library can learn how to use a 3D printer, study quietly using WiFi, catch up with a friend over a cup of coffee, and find an extensive collection of the latest best sellers and favorite classics. The library's goal has been and always will be to provide the services our community needs and to be a place where all Newtowners are welcome.

Planning Process

The development of this Strategic Plan involved over 1,000 members of the Newtown community who participated through serving on committees, providing information at focus groups, and responding to the community survey. Below is a brief description of the process which took place from January – June 2016.

- A **Planning Committee**, composed of 16 individuals from the Newtown community, as well as the President of the Library Board of Trustees and the Library Director, met four times to hear information on library best practices, learn about the results of the community needs assessment, develop a community vision, and determine the library's service priorities for the next three years. An exemplary group of community members enthusiastically agreed to serve on this committee, representing a wide variety of sectors. This in itself is a positive indicator of the connections that were already in place and the strength of the library in the eyes of its community. The diligence, candor, and enlightened thinking that emerged through the group process is a positive indicator for the future success of the plan.
- A series of eight **focus groups** were held in January. Seven of these groups were open to all Newtown residents; one was specifically for teens and preteens. A total of 55 individuals participated. Eight **interviews** with key stakeholders were also conducted.
- An online **survey** was available from January 27-February 16, 2016. Almost 900 individuals completed the survey.
- A **Work Group**, composed of five Board of Trustee members and three staff members, met four times to conduct a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, to develop a new mission statement, and to write goals, objectives, and measurements based on the service priorities.
- **Input from Library staff** was solicited through a staff survey, interviews with department heads, and meetings, including one that focused on the development of activities that will bring the plan to life.



Our Community

During conversations with a diverse group of community members, the unique nature of Newtown clearly came through. Despite recent challenges that reached national attention, Newtown is a place that people come “home” to – many respondents spoke of being born and raised in Newtown, and choosing Newtown as the place where they wanted to raise their children.

“I would ideally like to live in a community that would enable me to learn and exchange ideas on a variety of topics with a variety of people, from all walks of life who are culturally, financially, and ethnically diverse.” (55 year old)

“You want to live in a community that is great for you now, but even better for your children and grandchildren.” (33 year old)

“I have children and want them to be a part of a place with a strong sense of community where they feel comfortable to grow and learn and play, and thoughtful innovation will help our town meet our evolving and growing needs in new and exciting ways and encourage entrepreneurship.” (34 year old)



Community Vision

Based on the information from the community needs assessment (available on the library’s website at <http://www.chboothlibrary.org/2016-strategic-plan/>), the Planning Committee developed Community Vision statements that were later consolidated by the Work Group to guide the library’s service priorities for the next three years:

“We want a community where we collaborate freely and engage one another to enrich, attract, and grow human capital and business interests, but we face a widening socio-economic divide, a resistance to change, and increasing separation from one another. If we want to reach our aspirations, we need to create a community hub with greater interaction that offers opportunities for respectful and constructive engagement.”

Our Library

The importance of the Cyrenius H. Booth Library in the eyes of Newtown residents was also made clear through conversations and survey responses. An overwhelming majority of survey respondents consider the library to be very important to the Newtown community; when combined with those who responded “somewhat important,” the total reaches 99.5%.

The affection of the community for its library was also evident in an open-ended question from the survey and focus groups where people listed words that described the library as they see it now.



Aspirations for the Library

In focus groups and interviews, residents were asked to imagine the most important achievement of the Cyrenius H. Booth Library at the end of five years. Based on their responses, five main themes emerged:

Library as connector: The future library is envisioned as a place to connect groups and ideas that are currently seen as disconnected – young and old, past (genealogy and Newtown’s rich history) with future, people and resources, and as one focus group participant so eloquently put it, a place to connect “kindred spirits.”

Library as a place to learn in community: There is excitement about the idea of the library as a place for lifelong learning, not only as a physical setting, but as a place to learn *in* community with one another, bringing people together. Desires include more makerspace functions (audio, video, music, woodworking), training on new technology, and compelling programming.

Library as convener: Throughout the process, the growing influence of social media and the internet on “uncivil” discourse and the growing divides between groups in town were mentioned frequently. The library as an institution has historically played a role in bringing people together in a neutral setting and act as a convener of different groups and organizations for conversation and collaboration.

Library as partner: The library is seen as an ideal partner for the school system, the Senior Center, and Continuing Education.

Library as community hub: The lack of a natural center of Newtown gave participants an opportunity to imagine the library as a central gathering place. One focus group participant said that she hoped the library would become the place where people say “I need something, let me try the library.” The library can serve as the go-to place, both physically and virtually, to connect the community to one another.

Mission Statement

As approved by the Board of Trustees on April 12, 2016, the library's new mission statement is:

The Cyrenius H. Booth Library's mission is to promote the joy of lifelong learning, stimulate curiosity, support the exchange of ideas, and provide a welcoming gathering place for our community.



Goals and Objectives

Combining the insight provided by the Planning Committee and community feedback with professional knowledge of best practices in 21st century libraries, the following 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 three years. To put these goals and objectives into action, library staff have identified more than 180 activities to engage, enlighten, and enrich the lives of Newtown residents, a sampling of which are presented below.

Satisfy Curiosity

The Cyrenius H. Booth Library will be a key place to learn in the community by offering resources to support lifelong and intergenerational learning opportunities for Newtown residents. Newtown residents will be connected to one another, have their imaginations stimulated, and be supported in pleasurable reading, listening, and viewing experiences.

Objectives

- Provide hands-on educational opportunities
 - ◇ Measured by increase in number of educational opportunities, both in-person and virtually, by 50% over 36 months
- Increase staff interaction with patrons
 - ◇ Measured by increase in the number of interactions between staff and patrons inside and outside the library by 100% over 12 months
- Increase online streaming of content
 - ◇ Measured by increase in use of downloads and number of users by 100% over 12 months
- Increase circulation/use of collections & resources
 - ◇ Measured by increase in circulation numbers by 33% over 24 months
- Increase use of special collections (e.g. genealogy collection)

- ◇ Measured by increase in programs and services related to special collections and increase in interactions between staff and patrons related to special collections over 36 months

Selected Activities

- Develop language conversation groups
- Inventory library staff connections to community groups
- Implement genealogy activities such as the Storycorps app

Provide a Comfortable Place

Newtown residents will have a safe and welcoming physical space to meet and interact with others or to sit quietly and read, and will have open and accessible virtual spaces that support social engagement.

Objectives

- Increase patrons' sense of welcome
 - ◇ Measured by increased sense of welcome by 60% of patrons surveyed after 12 months
- Align physical and virtual spaces with patron needs
 - ◇ Measured by increase in use of library design best practices and increase in use of flexible space in library over 36 months
- Expand virtual spaces
 - ◇ Measured by increase in number of virtual spaces available and number of users by 100% each over 24 months



Selected Activities

- Use the patio and other outdoor spaces for programming
- Provide customer service training to all staff
- Create online newsletter

Create and Inspire Young Readers

Newtown's children will be inspired through programs and services to enter school ready to learn to read, write, and listen.

Objectives

- Expand special needs offerings
 - ◇ Measured by increase in number of programs offered to special needs groups or number of children participating over 12 months
- Expand partnership with preschools
 - ◇ Measured by increased communication between library and preschool staff by 100% over 12 months and increased number of visits, both in library and at centers
- Increase use of collection & online offerings for early literacy
 - ◇ Measured by increased use of collection and online offerings by 25% over 24 months
- Increase attendance at programs
 - ◇ Measured by increased attendance by 50% over 24 months



Selected Activities

- Survey residents to assess interest, age ranges, and days of the week for programs
- Inventory licensed home daycare providers
- Improve displays of existing resources

Express Creativity

Library users will be able to express themselves by creating original content in multiple mediums in a real-world or online environment.

Objectives

- Expand makerspace needs offerings
 - ◇ Measured by increase in programs, patron use, and hours available by 200% over 36 months
- Increase staff involvement with maker activities
 - ◇ Measured by increase in staff skills and demonstrated expertise with 100% able to refer patrons knowledgeably, 75% able to demonstrate activities, and 50% able to teach and work alongside patrons by the end of 12 months.
- Develop ongoing partnerships with makers, clubs, and educators
 - ◇ Measured by increase in partnerships and depth of interaction by 50% over 36 months
- Expand opportunities to share products of creative expression
 - ◇ Measured by increase in number of sessions introducing patrons to new media and skills by 100% over 36 months

Selected Activities

- Add new technologies/devices for digitizing old forms of media (VHS, Super 8)
- Reach out to Robotics Club, high school, middle school, Girl/Boy Scouts
- Conduct staff training on makerspace activities



Foster Successful Enterprises

The business community will be provided with the support and resources that they need to develop and maintain strong, viable enterprises.

Objectives

- Expand outreach to the business community
 - ◇ Measured by increase in staff available to assist business people, number of business-related inquiries, and number of interactions with business people by 100% over 36 months
- Expand offerings to the business community
 - ◇ Measured by increase in number of programs/services and amount of space offered in library by 100% over 36 months
- Evaluate collection, databases, and resources to support businesses
 - ◇ Measured by overall satisfaction and increased valuation of benefit to businesses by 75% of business users surveys over 36 months

Selected Activities

- Expand partnership with economic development arm of town
- Survey staff and board connections to business community
- Offer a home-based business series



Partner With the Community

The Newtown community will have a hub where they can find information about the wide variety of programs, services, and activities in town, as well as providing a site for Newtown residents to fully participate in community decision-making through respectful and constructive engagement.

Objectives

- Increase the library's connection to the community
 - ◇ Measured by increase in interactions with people who represent community groups, number of co-sponsored events, and number of liaisons from library to community groups by 25% over 12 months
- Increase opportunities for community engagement in civil discourse
 - ◇ Measured by number of forums focused on community issues and number of trainings sponsored/co-sponsored by the library over 36 months.
- Increase use of library by underserved populations
 - ◇ Measured by increase in referrals to library services from organizations currently serving the identified groups by 25% over 36 months
- Increase community awareness of library programming and services
 - ◇ Measured by increase in awareness by 75% of community members surveyed at the end of 36 months.

Selected Activities

- Strengthen connections to groups that meet at the library
- Facilitate training on running effective meetings
- Inventory existing materials/resources for people with special needs

Provide for Continuous Staff Development

The Cyrenius H. Booth Library will hire, train, encourage, reward, and celebrate a knowledgeable and dedicated staff. We will build and maintain a capable and proud team of innovative leaders and enthusiastically provide excellent services, programs, and resources to the community.

Objectives

- Align staff development with strategic plan goals and objectives
 - ◇ Measured by 100% having individual development plans by the end of 24 months
- Improve channels for staff communication, input, feedback, and recognition
 - ◇ Measured by increase in staff satisfaction with communication by 80% of staff surveyed at the end of 24 months
- Provide employees with a challenging work environment and opportunities to achieve the full extent of their potential
 - ◇ Measured by staff satisfaction indicated by 80% of staff surveyed by the end of 36 months.

Selected Activities

- Form interdepartmental staff working group
- Meet with staff to develop individual development plans
- Survey staff on current forms of communication, input, feedback, and recognition



Key Factors for Success

In order to meet the community's aspirations for the Cyrenius H. Booth Library, three key activities are essential: space planning, a marketing plan, and organizational realignment.

Space Planning: As with most public libraries configured in the 20th century, the library's current layout presents a challenge to delivering 21st century services. It is recommended that the library engage a space planner to align the building with the goals of the strategic plan. The community would benefit significantly from a library building that has clearly defined entry and exit points, provides sightlines across expanses, and achieves space flexibility to accommodate different activities and ambiance throughout open hours.

Action Step: Issue a Request For Proposal for a library space planning consultant

Marketing Plan: The role of the public library has changed from a place of learning to a storehouse of materials and back again to a place of learning, yet the key identifier of the public library remains the book. In order to expand the message so that all residents are aware of the library's many services, the library should engage marketing expertise to conduct a thorough examination of all messages and methods of communication with the public and implement recommendations as appropriate.

Action Step: Identify a marketing firm

Organizational Realignment: Whenever a new mission, vision, and goals are established, it is critical to examine the infrastructure of an organization. It is recommended that the roles of the Library Board, staff, and Friends of the Library be examined and properly aligned to carry out this plan.

Action Step: Complete organizational alignment plan

Planning Committee Members

Annika Brady, Newtown High School student

Kristin Chiriatti, Chairman, EverWonder Children's Museum

Andy Clure, Newtown Board of Education

Peter D'Amico, President & CEO, SCB International

Dr. Joseph V. Erardi, Jr., Superintendent of Schools

Sarah Findley, Speech Language Pathologist

Robert Geckle, President, C.H. Booth Library Board of Trustees

Timothy Haas, President, Chamber of Commerce of Newtown

Kelley Johnson, Friends of the C.H. Booth Library, Entrepreneur

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James Maher, President, Friends of the C.H. Booth Library

Brenda McKinley, Library Director

Robert L. Rau, Chairman, Newtown Economic Development Commission

Daniel Rosenthal, Newtown Police Commission, Newtown Rotary Club

Justin Scott

Monsignor Bob Weiss, St. Rose of Lima

Board of Trustees

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*Julia Starkweather

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William Lavery, Emeritus

Mary Thomas, Emeritus

(* indicates Strategic Planning sub-committee/Work Group membership)

Staff representatives on the Work Group

Brenda McKinley, Library Director

Andy Forsyth McCulloch, Head of Reference Services

Kate Sheehan, Head of Systems and Technical Services

Consultants – Maxine Bleiweis & Associates

Maxine Bleiweis, Principal

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