

**VERONA PUBLIC LIBRARY
STRATEGIC PLAN
2015 - 2016**

Strategic Planning Committee

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As public libraries throughout the United States continue to transform lives by providing critical services and new ways to access information, people turn to their local libraries for Internet access, technology training, assistance with job seeking, cultural enrichment, and resources to teach their children early learning skills. The Library Board of Trustees faces the challenge of financial constraints combined with rapidly changing technology and residents' requests for 21st century library services. To identify priorities for the future and use its resources most effectively, the Verona Public Library embarked upon a planning process to review all aspects of current library operations. This Strategic Plan spells out how the library will enhance the community by providing a local gathering place that will promote a continuum of education and entertainment starting with an early literacy program and continuing to expand horizons through offering lifelong learning for others. The Library will continue to pursue and develop partnerships with community organizations, reach out to potential Library patrons, strive to adapt the current facility to the needs of the 21st century, and help to prepare Verona residents for a bright future.

In creating the 2015-2017 Strategic Plan for the Verona Public Library, the Planning Committee reflected on the library's current operations, its strengths and opportunities for change and growth. The Committee reviewed notable recent accomplishments including the addition of new programming and staff as well as the achievement of minor facilities enhancements accomplished in partnership with township staff. Bolstered by this success and momentum, the Committee began its important work by gathering information from a variety of sources that included a written and online survey, Library Board and staff visioning exercises, four community focus groups and many conversations with community leaders. The Committee also explored current trends in library services and reviewed our current services and programs.

The first task in preparing this Strategic Plan was to take the information collected from the surveys and meetings and develop new mission and vision statements that reflect the community's specific library needs, public library trends, and the library's part in creating a more robust and knowledgeable community. This resulted in a plan that reflects concrete solutions to the current library needs of the residents of our community and selects and addresses specific service responses that the Library Board and the Library staff will concentrate on during the next 3 years and includes specific action steps for year 1 of the plan that together, through the plan's implementation will help to create a better quality of life for the residents of Verona.

COMMUNITY ENGAGED IN PLAN DEVELOPMENT

“The library needs to be updated without losing the historical charm of the building.”

Community engagement was central to the plan development process. In an effort to define the community’s opinions on the library and service expectations, the needs assessment process involved broad community participation and input that included a survey designed for both users and non-users, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews with community leaders conducted by the library director. These activities were undertaken to ascertain the perceptions of Verona residents about their library and to solicit positive and negative comments about the programs and services provided. Residents who attended the focus groups were highly engaged and provided relevant observations that played a key role in the development of the library’s major service responses, which will guide the Library’s strategic and operational efforts over the next three years

Focus Groups

The consultants conducted four focus groups that targeted specific groups of users: frequent library users; teens, seniors, and parents of young children. The following topics were discussed at these activities:

- Importance of a public library in the community
- The library facility
- Space for teens
- Communications and marketing
- Public perception of the library facility
- Programming for adults, teens, and children
- The library’s collections
- The library’s website, access to research databases, and public computers
- Customer service attitudes

Participants also shared their thoughts on what barriers (if any) prevent them or members of their family from using the library or making the most of its resources and what other libraries in surrounding communities they use and why.

Library Surveys

A survey of library users was conducted during the fall of 2014. In all, 365 responses were received: 264 online and 101 in print. Over 50% of residents responding to the user survey were over between the ages of 26 and 54, some filling out the survey with services to their children guiding their responses, and 36% were 55 or older.

A CENTER FOR INFORMATION AND DISCOVERY

The plan also addresses the need for a variety of improvements to the library facility so that the library can successfully achieve its vision of the future to *be a comfortable and welcoming community gathering place where people of all ages and cultures come together to read, learn, and be inspired*. Accomplishing this, however, will require a concerted effort on the part of the library board, township officials and residents who regularly use and rely on the services provided.

Notably, the comments received on the community survey and those that were expressed during the focus groups indicate a high level of support for the library. But despite the fact that minor improvements to the building, such as the meeting room renovation and some painting and HVAC work, have taken place over the last few years many residents expressed the need for a comprehensive building project that would create a more user friendly and welcoming library.

Increased services provided include the addition of new technologies, the expansion of the library's non-print collections and a greater emphasis made on providing adult and teen programming. However, residents are aware of the benefits of potential consortium membership and would like to see the library expand its resources by joining BCCLS (Bergen County Cooperative Library System) or another multi-library consortium.

The Library Board of Trustees, staff and Strategic Plan Committee hopes that this plan will provide the impetus for changes in the services we provide and to the library facility resulting in a public library that is responsive to the informational and recreational library needs of our community.

MISSION, VISION AND CORE VALUES

The Verona Public Library aspires to be the center of information and discovery in our community. Our mission statement reflects the commitment we are making to the community through relevant collections, up-to-date technology and interesting and informative programming.

OUR SELECTED SERVICE RESPONSES

In order to provide the best possible library for the community and to strive for continued excellence in its overall program of service, the Strategic Planning Committee recommends that the Verona Public Library focus a significant part of its financial, personnel and physical resources on the following five service responses. Each service response below includes related data and community input received, which informed the identification and selection of these five service responses:

(Note: Service Responses are in alphabetical order - not priority order.)

- **Connect To The Online World: Public Internet Access**

Through their public library, residents of Verona Township will have free high-speed access to the digital world and opportunities to explore new technologies through the Internet.

The importance of keeping up with the latest technologies was mentioned in several of the focus groups, particularly with respect to younger library users. Library computers need to be upgraded and several respondents mentioned the need to have full access to Microsoft Office products on the library's public computers. While the majority (51%) of all survey respondents indicated that they would like to see the library's collections (books, DVDs, and CDs) grow, over 28% also said that they would like greater availability of e-books and downloadable audiobooks and nearly 18% said that accessing research databases was an important service.

Over 40% of respondents indicated that the library's website was an important service and 2 out of 3 of the survey respondents would prefer to get information about the library through the library's website. There was a comment made at the focus group of frequent library users that the library's website has improved, but further improvements are needed. A parent of a young child indicated that the library's website was easy to use and visitors were not "bombarded" by useless information.

Wi-Fi was important to 26% of those who responded to the surveys. Over 15% wanted the library to further develop technology classes or provide assistance with learning to use new technology and mobile computing devices. Teens were interested in having more educational games available on library computers and access to online resources to supplement the school's curriculum on topics such as science, animals, current events and math.

- **Create Young Readers: Literacy From Birth Through the Age of 18**

Children and Young Adults will have materials, services, and programs designed for their age group that stimulate their imagination, encourage learning, and engage them in the world of reading, starting as infants and continuing through high school.

It is important that the Verona Public Library offers a wide range of services and programs to parents, caregivers, and organizations serving the needs of children, pre-teens and teens. The population of pre-teens and teens in Verona Township increased by 12.2% between 2000 and 2010 and 25% of the households have children under the age of 18. Moreover, one in four of the survey respondents between the ages of 26 and 55 indicated that they attended a program with their child or teen in the last year.

In 2013, the library held 210 programs for children age 11 and under with a total attendance of 2,942. Focus group participants, including one attended by older adults, viewed the provision of services for children and teens as an important function of the Verona Library; particularly since the library is part of the "Middle School Campus" and parents rely on the library as a safe place for children after school. Also, there was a strong indication from the participants in the various focus groups and surveys that children's programs and the staff's provision of service in this area are exceptional and something that the library needs to continue to provide.

According to participants in a focus group of teens, for the most part, many of their friends do not use the library. Several teens said that the lack of space for teens and the general poor condition of the building and furnishings were contributing factors. Participants, however, broadly agreed reading was important to them and that they enjoy the solitude at the library and that it is a safe place for them to meet up with their friends after school.

- **Satisfy Curiosity: Lifelong Learning**

Residents will have the resources they need to explore topics of personal interest and continue to learn throughout their lives.

According to the 2010 census the population of Verona is extremely well educated - 75.9% of the residents have at least some college through graduate or professional degree. This demographic would indicate a "thirst" for knowledge and a desire for lifelong learning both as independent learners and via classes and lectures provided by the Library.

There were 27 programs for adults sponsored by the library in 2013. And while they were highly regarded, nearly one in four of all survey respondents indicated that they would like the library to improve/expand its offerings. Comments during the focus group session with older adults were extremely supportive of more diverse programming and participants as well as survey respondents offered many examples of the types of programs they thought would be of interest to library users - including author lectures,

history and current affairs, concerts, book clubs/discussions and lifelong learning programs such as cooking and wine tasting.

Furthermore, many residents use neighboring libraries because of the diverse programs offered by libraries such as Montclair and Cedar Grove.

- **Stimulate Imagination: Reading, Viewing and Listening for Pleasure**

Residents who want materials to enhance their leisure time will find what they want when and where they want them and will have the help they need to make choices from among the options.

Over 81% of all survey respondents indicated that they had borrowed books during the past year. Of equal importance was the availability of various non-print media such as DVDs and books on CD that were very important to 60% of respondents.

E-books and other digital media were also important to 21% of the survey respondents; however, only 14% had actually downloaded a book in the past year. Focus group respondents indicated that there was limited availability to e-books through the library's website. Also, many people indicated that they use other libraries because of the availability of larger, more diverse collections.

More than 1/3rd of all survey respondents indicated that they would like to see the library join a consortium in order to expand the library's offerings in all formats, including digital media.

- **Visit a Comfortable Space: Physical and Virtual Spaces**

The Verona Library's patrons will encounter a welcoming, inviting, and accessible library building and virtual space supported by a customer-focused staff where they can meet and interact with others or sit quietly and read.

Verona residents are proud of their library and strongly support it as one of the best values for tax dollars. Library staff gets high marks for helpfulness and great customer service as indicated consistently in the survey responses and from focus group attendees.

With respect to the library facility, in many instances, residents face obstacles to visiting the library due to mobility issues or lack of transportation. A focus group held at the senior center revealed how grateful residents were for their community library. However, nearly 32% of Verona's population is over the age of 55 and while the library's location is convenient, the lack of parking, the general poor overall condition of the building and the lack of an elevator were cited as the reasons for not being able to use the library frequently or in some cases not at all.

Many responses to the surveys centered on the need for a major facelift and as one person wrote on the survey that a major renovation would "really enhance the

community.” Another person stressed the need to update/renovate “without losing the historical charm of the building.” Specific suggestions included access to the second floor and the meeting rooms via an elevator, updated restrooms, more comfortable chairs, new carpeting, painting/cleaning throughout, and more space for quiet interaction. Respondents of all age groups indicated that they would like to have a place to eat and drink in the library.

Several teens indicated that while they don’t use the library often, they might if there was a larger, more inviting space dedicated to them.

Library computers are heavily used and the space dedicated to this service is important to maintain. During the past year, 27% of survey respondents used a library computer to access the Internet and nearly the same percentage indicated that Wi-Fi is a very important service to them. In addition, the increased use of mobile devices demonstrates the need for sufficient electrical outlets throughout the building. However, several respondents indicated this was severely lacking and 42% asked for new study tables with electrical outlets.

These five service responses will provide the guide for providing new and exciting services and programs over the next several years. Not all of the library services that the library provides are included explicitly in these service responses. This does not mean that the library will discontinue them. Rather it will continue to provide a wide variety of services and develop a diverse collection of library materials that is reflective of the needs and interests of the community, although how we provide information may change as technology trends continue to develop.