

Message from the Head Librarian

I am pleased to present the 2017 – 2022 Strategic Plan for the Worcester Public Library. This dynamic plan will serve as a blueprint for the future of our library, and will guide us as we implement the ideas and services identified by the patrons we serve.

The Worcester Public Library is a library of the community with a mission to serve the people of Worcester and beyond. It is our sincerest hope that this plan outlines the voice of the people who spoke up about their vision of the library and how it is woven into the fabric of the community, providing a place for patrons of all ages, ethnicities, and abilities to gather, learn, and play.

This Strategic Plan is the result of extensive consultations with a wide range of local stakeholders. I would like to acknowledge the guidance, support, and contributions from the City of Worcester, the Board of Directors of the Worcester Public Library, the Worcester Public Library Foundation, the Friends of the Worcester Public Library, our staff, and our patrons.

Sincerely,

Geoffrey Dickinson
Head Librarian
Worcester Public Library

Library Mission Statement

The Worcester Public Library serves as a gathering place that actively promotes the free exchange of ideas in our democratic society. The library makes information and services available to all people while fostering intellectual freedom, protecting privacy, encouraging personal growth and enrichment, and celebrating our diverse community heritage.

Tagline

Your Open Door to Opportunity

Core Values/Principles

- 1) Serve everyone with efficiency and excellence in a welcoming environment.
- 2) Nourish the mind with ideas and experiences.
- 3) Honor the past and embrace the future.
- 4) Adapt to change and plan for innovation.

Introduction

For more than 155 years, the Worcester Public Library has offered an ever-changing landscape of services geared toward every segment of our rich and varied community. As the needs of our patrons continue to change, the library must evolve to meet these needs and remain relevant. While expanding services and addressing the needs of our current populace, we never stray far from our basic objectives of providing information and promoting lifelong learning.

With a city comprised of people from all walks of life, including families and children; life-long residents; academics and students; new Americans hailing from all over the world; and many others who have come to call Worcester home, the library must continue to adapt to the needs of our modern demographic.

The traditional model of the library as a repository for knowledge is no longer a broad enough description of the role the Worcester Public Library plays in the community. Patrons rely on the library to provide access to books, entertainment, and technology they may not otherwise be able to access, leveling the playing field for all.

The library has recognized the call to provide expanded services our patrons will benefit from, and has taken a forward-thinking approach to addressing the needs of all residents in our community. Through partnerships with other city entities and organizations, the library is able to assist in providing information and resources to all patron populations. By responding to the needs of the community in a collaborative environment, the library is positioning itself as a conduit to information and services beyond those traditionally found within a public library.

The city of Worcester is undergoing a significant revitalization, and the library has the opportunity to play a key role in this process. The downtown revitalization efforts and the Theater District Alliance are positioning the library as a cornerstone for services to the people of the city. It is the library's responsibility,

as one of these anchor institutions, to meet the growing needs of a changing urban demographic.

This Strategic Plan will guide the library during a period of growth, change, and innovation, adapting to both internal and external shifts in culture and community. The plan will evolve to meet the needs of our patrons, while continuing to strengthen our core values, mission, and vision.

About the Library

The Worcester Public Library is a vital and vibrant community center providing unparalleled services to the people in our community.

The Worcester Public Library was established in 1859 by Dr. John Green III, who donated his private library of over 7,000 volumes, "in trust for the free use of the citizens and public forever." Dr. Green's nephew, Samuel Swett Green, who later served as the Worcester Librarian, was a founder of the American Library Association (ALA) and is widely considered one of the earliest advocates of free reference and information services in the traditional public library setting.

Today, the library is far more than a repository of knowledge. Beyond the extraordinary collection in a multitude of languages and formats, the library serves the people of Worcester through its innovative programs, cutting-edge technology and creative exhibits. The Worcester Public Library expands its reach by meeting the people's needs through unique collaborations and relationships with institutions throughout Worcester and beyond. Many of the library's resources and partners may be accessed through the library's website, mywpl.org.

Library Locations

The Worcester Public Library has been a mainstay of the Worcester community, serving the public since 1859. The Main Library is a long-standing pillar of the downtown district. The Frances Perkins Branch Library, Great Brook Valley Branch Library, and the mobile libraries "Libby" and "Lilly" bring services to neighborhoods across the city. The recent addition of four *One City, One Library* Branches established public libraries in four Worcester elementary schools, bringing materials and services to teachers and students, as well as the public.

The **Main Library** is a key partner within the Theatre District, as well as in the Downtown Revitalization District. As such, we have the responsibility to work, not

only for the direct benefit of our patrons, but for the benefit of the other institutions within these districts. Collaboration between the institutions within the Theatre District helps bring theatre patrons to the library and, conversely, our patrons to the other institutions within the district, providing a means for us to work together on mutually beneficial programming.

The library has greatly benefited from the attention of Worcester City Manager Edward M. Augustus, Jr., and his vision for downtown revitalization. Plans are underway for renovations to the Main Library in the near future, which would align the physical building with the growing downtown community through the construction of a new entrance facing the Common. With this construction comes the opportunity to reimagine services; provide space for a new, exciting Children's Room and a larger, more suitable Teen Zone; and explore the possible addition of a media lab for patrons of all ages.

The Main Library is also home to the **Worcester Talking Book Library**, a free service for all Massachusetts residents who are unable to read traditional print materials due to a visual or physical disability. Through collaborations, the Talking Book Library has access to more than 1,253,000 volumes, including 88,000 recorded book titles, 21,600 digital book titles, 14,800 large type titles, 2,140 described video titles, 170 braille titles, and 100 magazine titles in recorded and braille format.

The **Frances Perkins** and **Great Brook Valley Branches** benefit from a very loyal patronage of all ages, many of whom use these branches multiple times in a week. The Frances Perkins Branch is the only functioning Carnegie branch remaining of the three Carnegie libraries built in the city of Worcester. Some needed improvements were made to this branch in 2016 using capital funds, and the possibility of more substantial improvements, and expansion, are under consideration. The Great Brook Valley Branch is located in a Worcester Housing Authority property, and the space is provided free of charge. This effective partnership has been in place since 1981, and is primarily used by children in the immediate neighborhood. While this is the smallest library branch in Worcester, there have been recent discussions regarding the possibility of a modest expansion of this location.

The mobile libraries, "**Libby**" and "**Lilly**," have proven to be popular additions - especially among children and older adults. Launched in 2012, Libby is well supplied with books, audiobooks, and DVDs for preschoolers through adults. Libby is a Wi-Fi hotspot with tablets and a touchscreen computer for library patrons to use onboard. Libby typically visits 65 different sites within a regular four-week schedule. Libby proved to be so successful that "Lilly" was added to

the service in 2014. With the addition of the second mobile library, WPL has been able to visit 31 Worcester public elementary schools, as well private and charter schools, once every four weeks throughout the school year. The two mobile libraries also bring library services directly to the public at after-school programs, summer camps, public apartment complexes, day programs for physically and developmentally challenged people, senior housing, as well as neighborhood and community centers.

The ***One City, One Library*** initiative is a collaboration between the city of Worcester, the Worcester Public Schools, the Worcester Public Library Foundation, the Worcester Public Library, and the community, with the purpose of bringing public library services and resources to the families and neighborhoods surrounding the public schools. The **Burncoat Branch**, located at the Burncoat Street Preparatory School; the **Goddard Branch**, located at the Goddard School of Science and Technology; the **Roosevelt Branch**, located at the Roosevelt School; and the **Tatnuck Magnet Branch**, located at the Tatnuck Magnet School, are situated in each of the four school district quadrants. This award-winning initiative provides library materials and services to teachers and students at each location, while also providing community access to library services when school is not in session.

We are at an exciting time in Worcester as the city reimagines itself and brings attention to the growth of its downtown district. The library is at the perfect point to reevaluate its place within the city: a place to gather, to learn, and to support our entire community.

Planning Process

Through the expanded focus on community, and developing services in response to their needs, the library completed a focused planning process to identify trends in the city of Worcester and beyond. We are grateful for the many individuals and community groups who shared their feedback, ideas, and observations as we built this plan. Library staff members, our Board of Directors, and city officials also played a crucial role in providing valuable insight into the future of our library.

The planning process began with five focus groups and numerous interviews with key stakeholders throughout the city. Members of the public were invited to two community conversations, which were facilitated by a professional library consultant, in order to solicit feedback and help shape our goals for the future.

In addition to these guided information-gathering sessions, comment boards were set up around the Main Library and Frances Perkins Branch to allow patrons the opportunity to express their opinions and offer feedback anonymously. A comprehensive survey was also conducted, with outreach to populations who may or may not currently use our library services.

Throughout the planning process, the Strategic Plan Steering Committee met regularly to review the results of our outreach and efforts, and to develop this final plan. As the data was compiled from the many responses, themes began to emerge. The library is viewed as a space where the community gathers, a mechanism to connect community members with other community resources, a means of connecting the community with technology, and the community's main provider of information resources on a myriad of subjects. These themes both reaffirm the focus and importance of the Worcester Public Library, as well as articulate priorities for the library over the next five years.

Statements of Focus and Priorities

Through broad-based community input and targeted interviews, the Strategic Plan Steering Committee was able to paint an extensive picture of how the library is viewed by the community - as an active and necessary component to life in Worcester. More importantly, community participants in the planning process identified key priorities and directions for the future of our library. The following themes will guide us as we look to build upon our existing programs and services.

1. Satisfy Curiosity and Stimulate Learning and Imagination

The Worcester Public Library will commit to actively respond to community needs and interests by providing access to a wide array of materials in a variety of formats, and by providing public programming focused on the library, the community, and the world. The Worcester Public Library will continue to be a library that strives to inform, educate, and entertain through its collections and its programming, recognizing the importance of offering diverse perspectives on topics. It will support and uphold the principle of intellectual freedom.

The Worcester Public Library will:

- a. Provide a collection in a variety of traditional print and new and innovative formats for home, electronic, and in-library use.
- b. Identify the information, education, and entertainment needs of non-users, and make collection and programming decisions to meet these needs.
- c. Promote the wide array of materials available through expanded marketing and promotion efforts.
- d. Evaluate “readership” and use of various elements of the collection and formats, and make adjustments as appropriate.
- e. Identify collections for preservation and digital reformatting, and plan an ongoing program ensuring preservation.
- f. Evaluate and make appropriate adjustments to public programming offerings, and seek opportunities to take library programming out into the community as part of the marketing and outreach efforts.
- g. Maintain the collection by evaluating it for importance to the city and the region, to the history of the library, and to the body of literature as a whole; and preserve these items to ensure their accessibility to the patron.

2. Connect with Technology

The community continues to value the role the Worcester Public Library plays in connecting our community to the online world by providing internet access and digital literacy opportunities. To that end, the library is committed to keeping abreast of changes in information technology, and ensuring that staff and the public have the training and tools necessary to successfully navigate the vast array of information resources available in the online world.

The Worcester Public Library will:

- a. Provide internet resources, and sufficient technology that are current and in good working order, in order to utilize those resources.

- b. Deliver a website that is easy to navigate and provides access to an array of resources, including information about the programs and services of the library.
- c. Provide free and reliable Wi-Fi and broadband access throughout all library facilities.
- d. Foster opportunities for staff and the public to learn about the digital resources offered by the library and effective use of the devices and tools used to access those resources.
- e. Explore opportunities to introduce the lending of technology tools for use within library facilities and for home use.

3. Provide Community Space

The public sees the provision of welcoming, clean, comfortable, and safe spaces - for the community to come together to gather, study, learn, explore, meet and make friends - as a continued priority for the library. The library commits to maintain and improve the comfort and design of all of its facilities, and to explore possibilities for improvements designed to enhance the patron experience. We will provide a friendly, approachable, and helpful atmosphere, with staff focused on providing assistance and enhancing the patron experience for all library users.

The Worcester Public Library will:

- a. Evaluate current facilities and ensure comfortable and safe library spaces.
- b. Evaluate the use of existing library spaces and consider ways to creatively repurpose space to meet changing user needs.
- c. Ensure user and staff safety and security, and to make improvements as needed.
- d. Provide friendly, knowledgeable, and courteous customer service in person, via the telephone, and online.
- e. Ensure equity of service at all library locations and in all neighborhoods of the City, enhancing the library's role throughout the city.

4. Share Information with the Community

Community input reaffirmed the importance of the library as a community resource to all of the residents of Worcester, by being a conduit of information between and among community organizations, governmental agencies, the business community, and educational and non-profit groups within the city. The library commits to actively seek out opportunities to collaborate with other organizations and institutions on efforts of mutual benefit to the larger community.

The Worcester Public Library will:

- a. Identify marketing and promotional means to advertise the array of existing library programs and services, and implement a marketing program targeting both current library users and those who do not currently use the library, whether they be long-term residents or newcomers to the city.
- b. Seek out underserved populations and determine how the library could be helpful to them in their daily lives, supporting formal and informal learning, development of job skills, services to immigrant and non-English language populations, and other similar areas of need.
- c. Provide services to individuals with visual, auditory, or physical impairments through our continued partnership with the Worcester Talking Book Library.
- d. Explore opportunities to engage faculty and students of local academic institutions to support the library in its community outreach efforts - through activities such as volunteer tutoring, technology assistance and training, and similar programs.
- e. Explore opportunities to serve as an aggregator of information on community resources.

Conclusion

These areas of focus and priority will guide library services, operations, and facilities through the next five years in order to meet the needs of the Worcester community. We studied community data from a wide variety of sources, including statistical and demographic reports and studies; one-on-one interviews with key community representatives; Board, staff and public focus groups; and surveys. The Long Range Plan will align with the city's and library's vision, mission, and values.

Staff will develop an annual Action Plan for the duration of the plan responding to community input and collected data. Continuous reassessment is an integral part of our planning process. The Action Plan must be a living document, depicting shifts in priorities based on our successes, changing patron needs, and integration of new technologies and resources.

The Worcester Public Library looks forward to being an active participant in the revitalization of Worcester. With determination, new strategic focus, and an exceptional staff of caring professionals, we will continue to be the people's library.

ADDENDUM

Our Community

Based on U.S. Census Bureau: 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates for Worcester, MA.

City of Worcester's population: 183,382

Second largest city in New England

City of Worcester's population is made up of:

- 25.5% children and teens (ages 0-19)
- 25.9% ages 20-34
- 25.1% ages 35-54
- 23.5% seniors (55 and older)
- 31% families below the poverty line (\$25,000 and under)
- 35.8% language other than English spoken at home (age 5+)

Based on Public Policy Center of UMass Dartmouth: The Foreign-Born Population of Worcester, Massachusetts (July 2015).

- Worcester is home to 37,790 immigrants from 85 countries (21% of City's total population)
- Currently the largest numbers of immigrants in Worcester are from Ghana, Dominican Republic, Vietnam, Brazil, and Albania

The city of Worcester estimates there are more than 36,000 college students enrolled in its colleges and universities

By the Numbers

The following statistics prove our patrons are taking full advantage of the offerings at all of our branches. These numbers are for Fiscal Year 2016 (July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016) and reflect all locations.

- 707,913 total visitors
- 963,031 items loaned
- 7,584 new library cards issued
- 103,202 total library card holders
- 10,471,272 visits to the website
- 82,416 reference questions answered
- 21,796 program attendees
- 181,748 computer sessions
- 75,507 downloads (eBooks, audio, music, videos)

Survey Results

Patron surveys were conducted from January 3 - 21, 2017 as part of the Strategic Planning Process. A total of 1,162 surveys were completed. Surveys were available at all locations, online at mywpl.org, and through a sponsored Facebook ad. A total of 87% of respondents came from Worcester.

Percent of respondents who viewed the following as very important:

Books, DVDs, CDs, etc.: 82.58%

Children's programs: 78.26%

Reference/information help: 71.58%

Services for individuals with impairments: 70.29%

Teen programs: 68.68%

Computers, Wi-Fi, printers, other tech: 66.12%

eBooks, databases, online resources: 65.92%

Adult programs: 62.08%

Museum passes: 51.11%

Study/meeting/event space: 51.03%

Which location do you use the most?

Main Branch: 89.82%

Other branches & libraries: 30.93%

Frances Perkins Branch: 23.25%

80.03% of respondents would like to find out about programs and services on the library website

What do you use the library website for?

View library catalog: 73.70%

Account login: 73.12%

Hours/directions/general info: 59.37%

Learn about programs & events: 52.59%

Which of the items listed below would be of value to you and your family in the next few years? Patron's response by subject:

EDUCATION:

54.37% value a wide range of adult learning experiences.

53.87% value online learning opportunities.

52.98% value a wide range of adult learning materials.

50.30% value STEAM programs for children and teens.

INTERNET ACCESS & DIGITAL INCLUSION:

70.55% value free high-speed broadband and Wi-Fi internet access, with public computing, printing, and scanning services.

54.43% value programs to teach people how to use digital tools.

ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:

56.02% value connecting people to training and career development resources.

54.6% value providing training, technology, and resources to help people develop job-related skills.

PUBLIC SERVICES & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

60.71% value preserving unique Worcester history resources and making them easily accessible to the public.

59.33% value meeting space.

58.23% value information access to city and government services.

50.20% value additional comfortable space for reading, working, etc.

ENRICHMENT & ENTERTAINMENT

84.29% value books, magazines, movies, and music in traditional and digital formats to enrich people's leisure time.

75.45% value a wide range of arts and culture experiences for all ages, such as concerts, exhibits, movies, book discussions, author events, etc.

54.57% value items for hands-on learning and fun in the library, or to borrow for home use, such as board games, musical instruments, specialty craft equipment, appliances, and tools.

Acknowledgements

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Portrait of Head Librarian Geoffrey Dickinson by Sue Groccia