



# AMESBURY PUBLIC LIBRARY

## COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS

### SUMMARY REPORT 2022

#### FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS = 10

- Focus Group #1 (6/7/22 12:00 pm-1:30 pm) = 7
- Focus Group #2 (7/13/22 3:00 pm-4:30 pm) = 3

#### 1. What are the very first two words you think of when you think about the Library?

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Active</li><li>• Building (x2)</li><li>• Center</li><li>• Charming</li><li>• Community</li><li>• Convenient</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Friendly (x2)</li><li>• Great</li><li>• Happiness</li><li>• Historic</li><li>• Kid-Friendly</li><li>• Open</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public</li><li>• Resource (x2)</li><li>• Upgraded</li><li>• Wanted</li><li>• Welcoming</li></ul> |
|---|--|--|

#### MISC. COMMENTS:

- Amazing customer service.
- Lovely building.
- Friendly and helpful staff.

#### 2. How can we encourage our community to use the Library as a community center?

##### ARE YOU COMFORTABLE VISITING THE LIBRARY?

- They're comfortable visiting the Library (x7)
- Has young children. The Library is their favorite place to go.
- Doesn't visit APL as frequently as she previously did. She finds APL's parking confusing. She spends most of her time at the Salisbury Public Library.
- Hasn't really visited the Library since COVID started.
- **Misc. (x2):** Walks to APL. It's so convenient. || Primarily orders books online. This capability makes her happy.

##### WHY OR WHY NOT?

- **Ramp Concerns (x8):** Library's rear entrance puts them off. It looks like a temporary wheelchair ramp. The ramp's slippery when it rains. (x7) || A double

stroller doesn't fit on the ramp. She walks around to the front and leaves the stroller before entering.

- **High-Quality Customer Service (x4):** Even the non-children's room librarians make kids feel welcome (x2) || APL's customer service is outstanding. || Elderly people sometimes don't know how to use their phones, and the Library staff doesn't make them feel stupid for not knowing.
- **Challenging Children's Room Access (x3):** The children's area upstairs is difficult to access when you have young children physically. (x2) || Brings her grandchildren to the Library. Sometimes, it's hard to access the children's room, even though the staircase itself is nice.
- There aren't any cozy chairs to sit in and relax. (x2)
- Senses that the doors are always open, which is a safety concern.
- Parking is available, but perhaps adding signage to direct people to areas available for specific uses would be helpful. It's not clear what is or is not a public space.

## **HOW TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO VISIT/ SPEND MORE TIME IN THE LIBRARY:**

### **Program Ideas (x23):**

- **Offer More Programs by Age Group (x9):** intergenerational programs (x7) || Availability of additional storytimes or young children's activities would prompt us to visit more frequently. (x2)
- **Display Passive/Self-Directed Art Shows (x7):** Post art for people to view in the Library (x2) || Have tiny art and poetry contest collections on display in the kids' room. || For adults, art on display in other areas could be an interesting use of space. || Likes the idea of perusing things as you walk thru the Library—not an event. Can browse the displays at leisure. || Present local artists' exhibits in the Library for self-directed exhibits/tours. || Issue of where that would be done. There isn't space for that. Artist of the Month could be something with an open house and reception. West Newbury's library has been very successful in having local history exhibits and artist exhibits. That could be successful in Amesbury.
- **Offer Simultaneous Children's and Adults' Programs (x2):** Run some kids' programs at the same time as an adult event so the parents can attend the adult event. || Genius! That would be wonderful. Just need to ensure the staff can handle the kids without their parents.
- Has attended topical programs in the past. Other local organizations offer some opportunities for people to gather. The Library can offer programs that bring people together. (x2)
- Very good idea to offer less structured activities, like hosting/leading special interest group meetings.
- Reserve specific times for social activities. Downstairs is a useful place to have communal things. Every day, offer some social time or a group activity to take advantage of "mingle time."

- Offer a wider variety of book clubs to attract different audiences.

### **Facility Ideas - Create Hang-out/Gathering Spaces in the Library (x6):**

- **Create Coffee Shop/Area (x2):** Having a place to sit down, relax, get coffee, and meet people in the Library would be convenient. Bookshops have coffee. || Likes the idea of having areas to get coffee and access the internet. It offers community members additional places to connect, meet, and talk. Special groups could meet there, like grandmothers', kids', or parents' groups.
- Both Salisbury and Newburyport have spaces to go and spend time on a laptop—space to spread out and use the Wi-Fi network. Offering this at APL would be a plus. (x2)
- Graduate students/students are looking for somewhere to study and a place to meet with peers. Gathering in the Library's public spaces can feel like you're being disruptive, so having a separate space set aside can help you avoid feeling like you're disturbing other users.
- The new teen section looks like it will be cozy. Create something like that for adults.

### **Marketing Ideas (x5):**

- **Promote Library's Offerings/Value (x4):** The more people who understand what the Library offers, the more comfortable people will become visiting and using Library services. (x2) || Understanding the value of what the Library offers is important. || There's a lot of community history information in the Library that many people don't know exists. Focus more on informing people of what's available.
- Reach out to high schoolers to see what they need/want (e.g., offer space for socializing, offer more activities that will bring them through the door).

### **LIBRARY RESPECTS PEOPLE'S PRIVACY (x11):**

- Staff members respect her privacy and are very helpful when connecting her with Library resources.
- Never experienced a situation in which privacy was an issue. Whenever they ask for information, they don't feel like it's a problem. Never felt like they needed to hide anything.
- Never felt compromised or uncomfortable.

### **MISC. COMMENTS:**

- Concerned about the community's history. Some community history materials that should be in the Library aren't there.
- Doesn't want to spend more time in the Library. Prefers to go in, get books, and leave. Her visits to APL are efficient, mission-focused trips.

### 3. Are there any barriers to service—things that impede your ability to receive the service you need or want from the Library?

#### TECHNOLOGY (x41):

- **Wait Times are Reasonable (x20):** No issues with Overdrive's wait times (x7) || Several people have successfully downloaded e-Books (x6) || Many participants reserved books online and picked them up in the Library. Timely process. (x5) || Frequently uses the Library's online resources. The wait time for books isn't that bad because you can view the hold list and estimate how long it will take to receive a book. Being able to use the other consortium libraries is awesome. It's incredible to be connected to so many libraries. || Great timely service. Books that need to be requested arrive promptly, and notifications are pleasant.
- **Library Website (x14):**
  - **Meets Expectations (x11):** Most participants have visited the website (x6) || Haven't spent too much time on the website. Most recently, she was looking for an adult book group date. || For the most part, she can find the Library information she's looking for, but she looks at APL's social media accounts more frequently. || No problem with it. They're able to reserve books easily, but they haven't compared it to other libraries' websites. || Doesn't use the website often but goes to it to follow up on Library announcements. || The website is simple, and info seems easy to find.
  - **Improve the Website (x3):** Add Library orientation and "how to" information to the website. || The website has been the same for a while. Stale. || Clean up the website. Make it more intuitive.
- **Applications/Online Resources (x7):**
  - **Grow Awareness of Technology Resources (x3):** Lack of awareness of the Library's databases is an issue. || Hadn't heard of Libby. It's not obvious on the website. || Wasn't aware of Libby audible. Didn't know about borrowing internet hotspots, and people don't know about several other technology resources. We need to promote them, like in a new parent welcome packet.
  - **Increase Accessibility/Variety of Applications/Online Resources (x3):** Can only access Ancestry at the Library. Would like them to be available offsite. || Does the Library have JSTOR resources for research? If they don't, they should get them. || Staff is very helpful in getting people online but having basic guides presenting how to do basic technical tasks would be helpful (e.g., connect your phone, how to check if your library card is expired).
  - Being able to get on the computer and access primary source material online to help with projects is great.

#### MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS (x19):

- **Open Hours are Fine (x9):** The Library's hours are fine. There are no issues. (x5) || Hours are convenient || Hours are fine. || The hours are good. || Hours are convenient. Being open every day from 8 am-7 pm would be great, but that's not

realistic. His goal is to use the Library more often, but for now, the hours are perfect.

- **Good Customer Service (x9):** Staff members offer abundant access to resources. Their service is above and beyond. They're caring—willing to take any extra steps necessary. (x2) || Never had to wait for the staff. Doesn't have any service issues. (x2) || Staff is knowledgeable. She mostly communicates via email. Responses are prompt. Good customer service || The Head of Archives and Special Collections is a busy person, so maybe have volunteers do some of the work under her direction. || Service is convenient. || Staff is enthusiastic. || Sometimes, the Head of Archives and Special Collections does the research for her, so that's hugely helpful. She has no trouble finding what she needs when she goes there.
- It's huge that we even have an archivist, so we've come a long way.

### **COLLECTIONS (x8):**

- **Enhance Access to Historical Materials (x7):** Historical information and materials are available in various local organizations. It would be good for the Library to collect and house the resources, so they're available to the public in the future. || Index the available historical materials/resources. People don't know it exists, and they can't find it. || The Bartlett Museum has hat factory videos. That's an issue because the videos should be available to everyone. The Library could be the landing place to safely store information/materials. It could give credit to the owning organization. || Provide the Head of Archives and Special Collections with additional resources to facilitate searching. Develop finding aids and collections inventory lists of what's available and share them with patrons can do some of the work and research ahead of time. Pursue digitization! || Interested in enlarging the capacity for digital historical information. || Access to the archives is limited. || Where are the historical DVDs about our town, and where can they be accessed? Does the Library have them?
- Digitizing that content would be a huge step
- It's important to provide easy access to physical space and materials, including indicating where things are.

### **MARKETING (x6):**

- Several people follow the Library on social media. (x4)
- It's great how closely the Library works with the elementary school library.
- Presenting information about the Library's history collection in a reader-friendly, accessible way with a monthly newsletter would be a good way to highlight the resources.

**PROGRAMS:** Storytime takeout is fantastic. Helps her feel connected.

**SERVICES:** The curbside pickup service during the pandemic was excellent.

## 4. What can we do to make it easier to find items and information in the Library?

### IMPROVE WAYFINDING IN THE LIBRARY (x16):

- **Add/Improve Signage (x8):** Signage could be better for new visitors or those who haven't visited the Library in a while (x5) || Add maps of the Library with a floorplan of where things are. Offer a visual (map) versus having people ask the staff where things are. || Wandering around to find a place can be disorienting to a new visitor. || Signage to direct people who don't already know the Library or who don't feel comfortable asking staff would be helpful.
- **Accommodate ESL and Foreign-Language Visitors (x8):** If there aren't any bi-lingual staff, perhaps add staff who are bi-lingual (x2) || All books are in English || ESL visitors need maps. || Signage in another language or using icons instead of words would be helpful. A multi-lingual guidebook could be given to people in the Library but also distributed by the Chamber of Commerce to introduce new people to the Library. || Be prepared to offer resources and services in the most common area languages (e.g., Spanish, Portuguese, and sign language). Have laminated sheets in these languages with at least basic information. || Use Google translate for the most basic questions in a foreign language. || Offer translator services like at the hospital. For example, you can call in and have a Zoom meeting with a translator.

### IMPROVE PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY (x11):

- **Space Issues (x7):** The physical space is challenging. It's maze-like because of the second level. || Can't move around very easily. The aisles are tight; It makes it difficult to bend or reach things on the top shelf. || If you have mobility issues, you can't get to the basement or second floors. || It's not easy to navigate the space. Space is limited because it's an old building. Having staff get items is a workaround, but browsing is the tricky part. || The first floor is accessible, and there is always someone on that floor. However, the stacks on the second floor are not accessible. The basement is not accessible and can be exclusionary. || The ramp is intimidating because it's so long, and you can see down/ through it. It can make people nervous and feel scary. The building is charming, but accessibility is a problem. || The bathrooms are in the basement. That's an issue. Problematic.
- **Accessibility Improvement Ideas (x4):** Add a bigger programming room—a space that accommodates more than 20 people (x2) || Install an elevator || Create more room to spread out generally (e.g., enlarge aisles).

### MISC. COMMENTS:

- It's not easy to find anything. They asked for a tour because they couldn't figure out where anything was
- Haven't seen anything to indicate that it would be easy to find things, but the staff is great, so she hopes there's something to guide people to what they want.

- Confident that ESL visitors would be welcomed.

## 5. How can the Library introduce new staff members to the community?

- Name tags would be nice. It would feel inclusive. (x3)
- Offering "staff picks" book displays help start conversations with the staff. (x2)
- When newly hired, send an email blast with the new staff person's introduction.
- Introduce people during the public comment agenda time at City Council meetings, which are televised.
- Use Mayor's Facebook live stream on Thursdays to introduce staff. 40 – 100 people watch it, and the recording can be shared.
- On the website's Contact Us page, add Q&A about the new staff person. It doesn't have to be for everyone.
- Add a "meet your librarian" page on the website.
- At regular meetings/programs, new staff members could be introduced.
- It's a great idea to have the staff visit other organizations. Doing so many activities around town enables the community to get to know that staff (e.g., introduce staff at a Chamber meeting).
- Offer a short class or a casual "meet your librarian" event. However, the staff should prioritize their time in the Library versus out of the Library.
- Possibly once a week, host an hour to provide Library orientation information and conduct a meet-and-greet to introduce staff to the community.

### MISC. COMMENTS:

- She follows the Library on social media, so she has seen some new staff announcements.
- Social media is a great way to introduce staff, but it misses the older population.

### MISC. UNRELATED IDEAS:

- **Strengthen the School/Library Relationship (x2):** Enhance the relationship with the schools, especially in middle and high school. Share book picks with them. Make them comfortable with the idea that they can visit the Library, and someone will be available to meet their needs. || Visit the schools. The Head of Youth Services does a good job by doing lots of outreach opportunities at the schools.
- **Reach Out to Seniors (x2):** The Senior Center could be another option for connecting with people who need things to do. Library book groups exist, but maybe the Library could do more outreach with seniors because they're looking for things to do. || The older population maybe can't physically get out easily. Perhaps there's a way that the COA van could be routed to the Library.
- For remote users, a bookmobile could be used as an outreach tool. Pursue a grant for a bookmobile!

## 6. What issues now facing the town do you think may impact the Library?

- **Grow Community Support for a New Facility/Major Renovation (x8):** Likes having the Library downtown. Loves the building's history. Wouldn't want a brand-new Library. Would prefer to update the existing facility. (x2) || Assess how much community support there is for a new building. || There's more support for a new facility now than there was before due to changing demographics || People feel the Library is connected to the city, so people believe the city should take care of whatever needs the Library has (city asset). It's hard to sell people on a capital campaign. For example, people want the Library to be located downtown and fabulous but don't want their taxes increased. || We must retain the Library's charm. Would not want to see the space changed. || A desirable physical location would increase support for a new building. Avoid the situation experienced with the new school location (contentious). || It's important to conduct surveys to get input about facility needs from current residents.
- **Current Facility Challenges (x5):** The building itself is an issue. || Keeps coming back to the space. Need it to accommodate lots of activity and offer hang-out space. Consider how to plan 5-10 years ahead to grow the necessary community support for a new building. || Library building issues in the past year require a dedicated maintenance/repair plan. || There's not a lot of space around the Library. Not sure what improvement options are available. || There are significant issues with the building, which seem overwhelming. The Library needs a lot of basic work done on it. There are significant physical plant issues.
- **Changing Demographics (x4):** Community is becoming more diverse. Need to increase engagement with new population groups. (x3) || Elementary school child's class has been getting more diverse as each year passes. Some new classmates don't speak English. The Library must start preparing for the community's increasing diversity and the recent influx of new residents.
- **Economic/Financial Challenges (x4):** Finances affect everything || The town's long-term building plan neglects the Library. || Library's budget is one of the lowest every year, but people of all ages use the Library. || Ensure the resources needed to support the Library are available. || Elementary school project is a challenge because of people's reactions to a potential increase in taxes, which means a large investment in the Library would likely be a hard sell.
- **Political Issues (x2):** Politically, we've had a mayor who would have closed the Library. Political support for the Library is fragile. We need to be careful about that. || Being part of the government body and under this mayor is challenging. We need to be more closely connected to what's going on in town—be integrated into the community more. Play a bigger role.
- The Library is located on the "tricky end of town." Most of the community's activity is based on the other side of town. The Library should participate in activities at the other end of town, like big events that draw in lots of people. It could increase awareness and attract new target groups.

- The Library says it wants to be the cultural center of the community. Clarify the message. What does that mean?
- Support the collection and retention of contemporary community history. Ensure the Library actively collects information about modern events. Are we actively documenting the events and event participants? The Library needs to be responsible for documenting those events.
- Need to improve Library advocacy overall because all populations are affected.

## 7. How important is it to have a good library in our community?

- **Very Important/Critical (x11):**
  - The Library is a cultural center for Amesbury. It is used for so many things. There are very few spaces for young people to safely come and go as they please. The Library is invaluable to us. (x2)
  - Can't imagine our community without a good library. (x2)
  - For our community, it's crucial. There's no youth center or other gathering places. We don't have many intergenerational gathering places. It makes the Library even more important.
  - It would be devastating if there was no Library. She doesn't have kids and doesn't see a return on her taxes as much as others but believes it's very important to have a good Library.
  - If we want an educated citizenry, we need a good library. || It's foundational for children to have a library to visit.
  - Libraries offer an equal opportunity experience. It's important to have facilities like that in a town like this.
  - Consider the Library the center of the community. It's more than a government office. It's the one building that is right in the middle of town and used by all. It's the most important draw for the entire community.
  - It's utterly essential to have a good library in the community. Government offices aren't comfortable, but the library is a space for me.
  - It's central to the town's culture. It's a centralized location for and consolidator of resources of the history of the community. They can be the directive and know what is where. A key position for the culture of the town.
- We need to have a new building. It is critical.

### MISC. COMMENTS:

- **Library of Things is Popular (x8):** Several participants are aware of and like the idea of the Library of Things. One person check-out lawn games and kids' kits. (x6) || The Library of Things/Kits are wonderful (x2)
- Middleton has a renovated library with meeting rooms and spaces that accommodate many different uses. Non-profits need meeting space, and the library offers that.

- APL's staff is more friendly and helpful than other libraries' staff. (x2)
- Being a member of the library consortium means that nothing requested is ever unavailable
- It's not the Library's responsibility to hold every book. The most important element of a good library is the meeting and social gathering spaces that encourage interaction.
- At the Library, you know you're getting the truth.
- Community members come to the Library with an idea or topic they want to learn about and get resources/information. The Library's a much better tool than just going online.

## **8. What could the Library do to better serve the community and the Town of Amesbury? What advice do you have?**

- **Marketing (x5):** Grow the Library advocacy. || Improve the Library's marketing activities. || Increase awareness of the Library's programs and services. The Library doesn't give itself enough good PR. People don't know what they have to offer. || The Library does more with its budget than any other town department. Every penny spent on it is valuable. Not enough people know. || Diversity representation is important, especially for young people. Library represents and welcomes everybody. The Library needs to promote what it already does more. Increase people's awareness.
- **Enhance/Increase the Space (x3):** Improve the organization of the Library's space. || Just need a new space. It creates opportunities to be more involved in the community || Continue to look at creative, non-library-related uses of the building (e.g., civic organizations' meetings, promenade).
- **Offer More Technology Resources (x3):** The Wi-Fi network needs major improvement. It should be more consistent/accessible. || Help people do things on the computer is critical. Teach people how to navigate the basics of the computer, like paying bills. Offer tech support and improve technology literacy. || Many people don't have access to computers and the internet. Increasing that basic access.
- **Enhance Program Offerings (x2):** Offer more programs and lectures. She would even pay to support these programs. || Record programs/lectures available online so they can be viewed later. The local cable company could help.
- Create Library displays for different holidays/religions.

### **MISC. COMMENTS:**

- Keep on doing what you are doing. Be a happy, friendly place.
- Every program at the Library is fabulous, but the space to hold those programs is an issue.