



AMESBURY PUBLIC LIBRARY

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FISCAL YEARS 2024–2026

Submitted by:



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Amesbury Public Library

Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2024–2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
ABOUT THE LIBRARY	4
HOURS OF SERVICE	4
PERSONNEL	4
GOVERNANCE.....	4
HISTORY	4
OUR PLANNING PROCESS	5
WHAT WE LEARNED	6
OUR PLAN	6
LIBRARY VISION STATEMENT	6
MISSION STATEMENT	6
CORE VALUES	7
COMMUNITY VISION STATEMENTS.....	7
STRATEGIC GOALS, SUPPORTING OBJECTIVES, AND STRATEGIES.....	8
ANNUAL ACTION PLANS.....	11
MEASURING AND COMMUNICATING OUR PROGRESS	11
PLAN APPROVAL	11
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	11
FINAL THOUGHTS.....	12
APPENDICES.....	13

INTRODUCTION

Every few years, the Amesbury Public Library undergoes a rigorous planning process to establish its goals for the next several years. Our most recent Strategic Plan expired in FY21. However, just as we were about to embark on developing a new Plan, the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to shift our focus to crisis response.

Throughout the pandemic, Amesbury Public Library (APL) operated in a world of uncertainty and continually adapted to changing health, safety, and service needs. Post-COVID, we established new workflows, stabilized operations, and reorganized our staffing model. More than 75% of the current staff were hired within the last two years.

With the stabilization of operations, we felt properly poised to develop a new Strategic Plan for our community. Because we have seen how quickly the world can change and want to be as adaptable as possible, we opted to develop a Plan with a three-year term instead of the more typical five years. We believe this offers us more flexibility.

It is essential that the Library has an updated Strategic Plan for several reasons. A Strategic Plan provides a framework to guide our work; it presents our priorities and how we intend to achieve our goals. The planning process engages the community by soliciting feedback at various stages. This process helps us analyze what the Library is doing well and identify areas for growth. It also demonstrates the Library's commitment to transparency with the community.

Having a current Strategic Plan on file is also helpful when pursuing supplemental funding because it demonstrates the Library's mindful allocation of resources. For example, it's a requirement for applying for grants from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) under the federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) program. Other grant funding agencies also require the Library to have a Strategic Plan.

We started this process in January 2022, shortly after I was appointed director. It has been a year marked by major changes in the world and here in the Library. We experimented with different service models, settling on a new normal where curbside pickup is permanently available. Programming moved outside onto the side lawn due to facility issues on our lower level. Eight of our eleven staff changed over, and we restructured roles and responsibilities as we rehired. As we look to the future, this Strategic Plan will help guide us through continued changes while maintaining a high level of service for our community.

Aimie Westphal
Library Director

About the Library

Hours of Service

The Library is open:

- Monday-Wednesday 9:30 am-8 pm
- Thursday and Friday 9 am-5 pm
- Saturday 9 am-1 pm and 2-5 pm

Personnel

The Library has 11 staff members:

- Director
- Assistant Director
- Head of Youth Services
- Head of Archives
- 2 Youth Services Assistants
- 1 Reference Librarian
- 1 Technical Services/Reference Librarian
- 1 Librarian (part-time)
- 1 Circulation Library Assistant
- 1 Circulation Library Assistant (part-time)



Two high school Pages and several volunteers also support the Library's activities.

Governance

The Library Board of Trustees is made up of nine elected members serving four-year terms. The Board is responsible for setting policy and goals for the Library. The Library Director is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Library. The Library Director reports to the trustees as well as to the Mayor. The Library is part of the 36-member Merrimack Valley Library Consortium (MVLCC) and is a member of the Massachusetts Library System (MLS) that shares its materials through daily delivery.

History

The community of Amesbury has supported and celebrated reading and literacy for decades. Local lyceums and libraries, from social libraries to factory workers' libraries, arose as early as 1800 to fill the citizens' growing desire to learn and read.

In its earliest inception, the Salisbury and Amesbury Social Library, which later became the APL, allowed subscribers to borrow on behalf of the household. Members paid dues for access to the Library. Catalogs from the earliest days indicate broad interests ranging from travelogues to romance and the classics.

In 1890, the community voted to establish the Library as public. This eliminated the need for membership fees for borrowers and allocated town funds to support new purchases. Shortly after, it was determined that the community deserved a modern library building.

Various supporters contributed to the endeavor's success, from Joshua Aubin, whose donation of books formed the core of the original collection, to the two women who facilitated the construction of the new Library building in 1901. Lucy Ordway's property was purchased to serve as the site for the new public library building, and Mary Barnard's generosity opened the doors of the new library to an ever-growing number of residents. Ms. Barnard's gift funded most of the Library's building costs and included additional funding for operating expenses for the first several years. The free public library building has operated in its current location since 1901.

Collections grew beyond serials and the classics to include material for trades and practical arts, such as farming and engineering. The hours were expanded to ensure the factory laborers and farmers had some access to the collections and the facility.

In the 1940s the collection had outgrown the original library design. By 1956 a second floor had been added to the stack wing and spaces for children and teens were expanded to meet growing demand.

As trends in communication and technology change, the Library continually adapts to offer discovery tools and strengthen information literacy to meet 21st-century needs.

Over the past two years, we faced significant challenges as we navigated the COVID-19 pandemic. After closing our doors to the public for three months, we reopened to offer curbside pickup and reoriented our work to ensure our community had access to critical Library resources and services.

Offering spaces to gather, grow, and learn, and maintaining well-curated collections remain at the core of our mission.

OUR PLANNING PROCESS

The multi-month process included numerous feedback-gathering activities with the staff and our community. Initially, the library director and strategic planning consultant had in-depth project planning conversations. The consultant then led two SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, results) exercises—one for the Library staff and one for the Board of Trustees and Friends of the Amesbury Public Library.

A 10-person Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC) was formed with a trustee, a Friends of the Amesbury Public Library representative, three Library staff members, and five community members representing a variety of demographic groups and organizations. During its four-month term, the SPAC met three times to:

- Contribute ideas regarding what the Library should try to learn and from whom during the planning process,
- Attend an in-person facility tour and facility-related brainstorming session, and

- Participate in a community visioning exercise that identified desirable Amesbury attributes and how the Library can contribute to the envisioned ideal community.

We conducted a community survey and two focus group sessions for the public. One focus group was made up of interested community members, and the other group engaged representatives from local cultural institutions.

Our consultant oversaw the data gathering activities and summarized the results. The director collaborated with Library staff to draft new mission and vision statements, create new value statements, and write strategic goals, supporting objectives, and strategies. The Plan was presented to the Board of Trustees in September for review and approval.

In addition to collecting community feedback, the Library compiled key statistics and background information about Amesbury and the Amesbury Public Library. Profiles of the community and Library are presented in *Appendix B—Amesbury Community and Library Profile 2022*.

WHAT WE LEARNED

- Our staff provides excellent customer service, and we need to invest in them to maintain this high quality of service.
- The community wants the Library to be a gathering place to work, learn, and connect with others.
- The community values arts and culture highly, and the Library plays a key role in offering free, accessible programming to meet this need.
- The Library is an essential resource for all ages.



OUR PLAN

Library Vision Statement

The Amesbury Public Library fosters connection in the community through learning, inclusivity, respect, responsible stewardship, kindness, and joy.

Mission Statement

The Amesbury Public Library, under the authority of its Board of Trustees, provides safe space for lifelong exploration and learning, public understanding, freedom of expression, experiencing beauty, and wonder through the best possible resources, facilities, and services for our community.

Core Values

Service (Kindness and Empathy)

We strive to provide the best possible service and to listen and respond to our community members' needs.

Responsibility

We believe all people have the capacity to create positive change in their own lives and in their communities. We will responsibly manage our facility and be environmentally minded.

Intellectual Freedom

We believe in free, equitable, and confidential access to information for all members of our community in service of a democratic society.

Inclusion

We understand the harm caused by systems of oppression and inequity. We seek to provide access to all and to dismantle barriers.

Diversity

We recognize and honor diversity of opinion, experience, culture, race, gender, and language.

Safety

We strive to provide public spaces that are clean, safe, and well maintained.

Joy

We believe in sharing and celebrating joyful moments in our interactions and through our work.

Lifelong Discovery

We believe all people deserve access to tools, resources, and spaces that inspire curiosity and learning.

Community Vision Statements

The Library's 10-person SPAC brainstormed a series of vision statements reflecting the ideal Amesbury and prioritized the vision statements to identify those the Library can best support and positively impact.

Following are their top two community vision statements:

- Amesbury provides and supports equitable and adaptable learning opportunities across a broad demographic spectrum for all stages and types of learning in and beyond Amesbury.
- Amesbury fosters innovative services that are responsive to current and future residents.

The full community visioning exercise results are presented in *Appendix C—APL Community Vision Statement Results Report 2022*.

Strategic Goals, Supporting Objectives, and Strategies

ESTABLISH THE LIBRARY AS A CENTER FOR LEARNING, ENRICHMENT, AND JOY

Objective: Improve access to our collections and programs.

Strategies:

- Develop access tools and services for identified areas of need in the community.
- Provide adult programming opportunities for lifelong learning, literacy, and cultural exploration.
- Improve the cataloging and classification of all collections across disparate media.

Objective: Foster interest in the history and culture of Amesbury.

Strategies:

- Increase awareness of and access to the Local History Collection.
- Expand our collaboration with area cultural heritage and history organizations.

Objective: Connect our community to learning opportunities with a robust assortment of technology tools.

Strategies:

- Provide modern technology that supports varying levels of technology literacy.
- Improve the digital and IT infrastructure for the Local History Collection.

Objective: Facilitate civic education and understanding.

Strategies:

- Collaborate with City Clerk’s office and City Departments on municipal records management.
- Increase civic understanding through programming and outreach.

INCREASE AWARENESS OF THE LIBRARY'S VALUE

Objective: Become a community hub for information.

Strategies:

- Create physical spaces that foster connection.
- Expand use and variety of digital tools to share content.

Objective: Recognize diverse voices in our feedback loops and seek out varied viewpoints.

Strategies:

- Embed diversity, equity, and inclusion in all we do.
- Provide developmentally appropriate programs and services for teens and tweens.
- Collaborate with communities that are underrepresented in the archives and Local History Collection to preserve, access, and share their histories.

Objective: Collaborate with community members and organizations to create programs that support the community's interests and needs.

Strategies:

- Collaborate with the Merrimack Valley Library Consortium (MVLC) to implement inclusive and rigorous collection development efforts.
- Create welcoming and functional spaces in our building that accommodate informal gatherings.
- Formalize outreach relationships with educators and community groups.
- Work with first responders and social services groups to provide compassionate intervention and social support programs and services.

INVEST IN OUR TEAM, WORKFLOWS, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Objective: Strengthen culture of learning, collegiality, and service.

Strategies:

- Support staff at all career levels with training and mentoring.
- Provide relevant staff development opportunities.
- Assess staffing levels and compensation packages for parity with peer libraries.
- Draw on the community to build Library volunteer and internship programs.

Objective: Prioritize operational and financial sustainability.

Strategies:

- Develop a plan for applying for grant funding.
- Ensure policies and procedures align with our values.

ACTIVATE OUR COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT

Objective: Ensure the Board of Trustees has the tools and resources it needs to excel.

Strategies:

- Align Board activities with the Library’s strategic goals.
- Provide opportunities for Trustees to apply their professional expertise to their Board roles.

Objective: Ensure the Friends of the Library group has the tools and resources it needs to support Library programs and initiatives.

Strategies:

- Clearly and consistently communicate Library goals and priorities to the Friends’ Board.
- Support the Friends’ fundraising efforts.

Objective: Expand and strengthen the Library’s charitable giving program.

Strategies:

- Cultivate relationships that will increase major gifts and bequests to the Library.
- Promote the Amesbury Public Library Charitable Trust.

ENSURE OUR BUILDING AND FACILITIES MEET OUR COMMUNITY’S NEEDS

Objective: Develop a holistic and sustainable approach to building management.

Strategies:

- Revitalize the building preservation program.
- Develop a multi-year Building Master Plan emphasizing accessibility.
- Improve signage and wayfinding throughout the facility.

Objective: Improve facilities management.

Strategies:

- Expand staffing for facility and preservation projects.
- Establish clear documentation and tracking tools to manage the facility and grounds effectively.

Annual Action Plans

The APL develops an annual Action Plan made up of specific activities and strategies designed to help the Library achieve its strategic goals. The Action Plan captures new initiatives and tasks designed to support the Library’s specific objectives and address changing needs. The Action Plan is updated annually and kept on file at the MBLC.

Measuring and Communicating Our Progress

The director and the Board of Trustees’ Long-Range Planning Committee will evaluate the Strategic Plan twice annually to monitor our progress. Annually, the director will report the Strategic Plan’s status to the Board of Trustees. Annual Action Plans will be evaluated by the director and department heads throughout the year. Each Action Plan will be presented to the Board of Trustees before it is submitted to MBLC annually. Any major changes to the Strategic Plan will be filed with MBLC.

PLAN APPROVAL

On September 14, 2022, the Library’s nine-person Board of Trustees unanimously approved this Strategic Plan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following people who generously shared their time, energy, and input in our strategic planning community feedback activities:

Library Staff:

- Jodie Blouin
- Elizabeth Burton
- Peter Espief
- Clare Dombrowski
- Meghan Fahey
- Jessica Fountain
- Rebecca McBrien
- Ashley Montano
- Skylis Reed
- Stephanie Smith

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

- Anne Campbell, Chair
- Laurie Cameron, Vice Chair
- Pam Gilday, Secretary
- Gail Browne
- Jessica Ducrow
- Audrey Proctor
- Brenda Rich
- Delia Anne Rinaldi
- Bethany Sullivan

Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (Chair, Aimie Westphal):

- Joy Adams
- Steve Bastien
- Clare Dombrowski
- Meghan Fahey
- Katie Fawkes
- Tanu Jain
- Johnathan Miller
- Bethany Sullivan
- Henry Zapata

We would also like to thank Barbara Alevras, Sage Consulting Services, who served as a consultant on this project, for her facilitation and guidance in the planning process.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This Strategic Plan is the result of eight months of work during a time of immense change. It identifies our core focus areas and how we will maintain and grow to meet the community's needs. Our Plan will guide Library staff in programming and service decisions for the next three years. We believe this tool will aid us as we continually strive to ensure our facility and programs support our community's ongoing educational, social, and cultural needs.

APPENDICES

Following is a list of Strategic Plan document appendices. They are available for download and review at the following link: <https://amesburylibrary.org/about-us/strategic-plan/>

Appendix A—APL Strategic Planning Project Process Flowchart: The flowchart presents the Library’s planning methodology, including the timeline, assessment mechanisms, and process participants.

Appendix B—Amesbury Community and Library Profile 2022: This document presents infographics with key Amesbury community statistics and Amesbury Public Library statistics related to its programs and services.

Appendix C—APL Community Vision Statement Results Report 2022: The Library’s Strategic Planning Advisory Committee brainstormed a series of vision statements reflecting the ideal Amesbury and prioritized the vision statements the Library can best support and positively impact. The results of the committee’s activities are presented in this report.

Appendix D—APL Community Survey Results Summary Report 2022: The community survey was conducted in May 2022. A summary of the results is presented in addition to graphs and charts.

Appendix E—APL Focus Group Summary Report 2022: This report presents highlights of the feedback and ideas about the Library’s collections, services, and staff generated in a series of two focus groups conducted with 11 community members.

Appendix F—APL SOAR Exercise Summary Results Report 2022: This report documents the results of two environmental assessments of the Library’s strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results. One was conducted with the Library’s staff and another with both the Friends of the Amesbury Public Library officers and the Library’s Board of Trustees.