

Belleville Public Library



Strategic Plan 2015 - 2018

Adopted July 13, 2015

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Introduction

April 2014: By every traditional measure, the Belleville Public Library is successful and well run. It would have been easy for the Library Board of Trustees to opt out of doing a strategic plan for our library. Usage rates per capita were more than twice the average of all Wisconsin libraries, programs were well attended, feedback from patrons sang the praises of friendly and skillful staff, and there was no fiscal crisis.

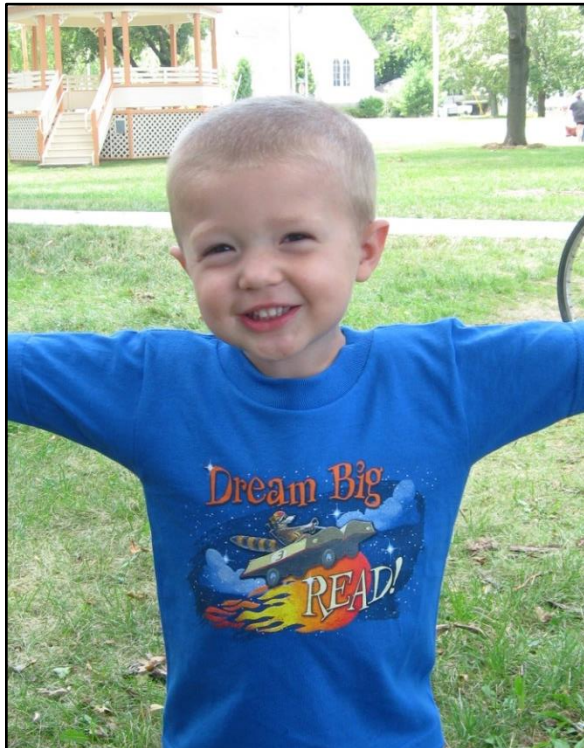
These achievements had been realized without any overall plan ever having been written for this library. But a great community deserves a great library. The Board and its new Director, Bronna Lehmann, sensed that it was time to look deeper to gauge the nature of changing community needs and the way technological advancements are impacting information access. Their goal was to set a clearer course into the future – a world very different from the one that existed when Belleville’s library was founded 135 years ago or even that which existed 36 years ago in 1979 when the Library moved to its present location.

So the planning journey was begun. The decision was made to engage in a robust and detailed planning process. It was a long journey which took over a year to complete. The Board charged a special committee of dedicated individuals to really listen to community voices about what both library users and non-users thought was needed and to gather the community’s ideas about going forward. As a result, the planning committee spent months engaged in focused listening sessions with small groups of residents. This was followed by the design and distribution of a community-wide survey. Over 800 individuals responded, which netted over a thousand comments and much helpful data. In addition, the committee studied national and state research about library trends, looked at local demographic statistics, and asked the library staff about what they thought was important. These inputs were used to deliberate carefully about the Library’s mission and vision to create a truly strategic plan for Belleville Public Library’s next three years.

The following is the result of the efforts of the Board of Trustees and its strategic planning committee – five overall strategic goals with related specific objectives for the Library to focus on during 2015 - 2018.

Our Mission

The Belleville Public Library is a strong community partner providing programs and services that bring people together, foster creativity, and encourage lifelong learning. We preserve our storied past, enrich present lives, and prepare for an ever-changing future.



Our Vision

To be the welcoming heart of our community where all come to learn, discover, create, and connect.

Our Core Values

The Belleville Public Library will guide accomplishment of our Mission and Vision by:

- 1. Being a warm and welcoming place for community members to gather.*
- 2. Being actively engaged in the life of the community.*
- 3. Employing a collaborative, creative, and positive staff focused on library users' interests and needs.*
- 4. Being good stewards of the Belleville Public Library's financial and material resources.*
- 5. Ensuring ready, equal, and equitable access to library materials.*
- 6. Protecting confidentiality of library patron records.*
- 7. Championing everyone's right to intellectual freedom.*

“A library outranks any other one thing a community can do to benefit its people. It is a never failing spring in the desert.”

-- Andrew Carnegie

Goal 1

Promote literacy and enrich people's lives through lifelong learning.



Objectives

- ◆ A: Promote the enjoyment and the skill of reading for all ages and abilities.
- ◆ B: Help parents and caregivers prepare their children to be successful readers and lifelong learners.
- ◆ C: Offer programs and materials that pique curiosity, encourage exploration, and engage all learners.
- ◆ D: Provide hands-on opportunities for children and adults to develop their creativity, build problem-solving skills, and gain first hand exposure to and greater comfort with emerging technologies.
- ◆ E: Support community members with practical information as they navigate through their lives – relationships, health, finances, caregiving, career changes, retirement – and the host of challenges and opportunities along the way.
- ◆ F: Provide high quality instruction, programs, and materials that support personal growth and aspirations.

Goal 2

Provide a welcoming, vibrant atmosphere that draws community members together.



Objectives

- ◆ A: Provide a comfortable, accessible destination for all community members to gather, read, learn, and socialize.
- ◆ B: Sponsor events appealing to a broad range of interests that provide opportunities to connect with other residents and be involved in community life.
- ◆ C: Foster partnerships, communication, and problem solving that enhance the quality of life for Belleville residents.
- ◆ D: Maintain our emphasis on friendly and well-trained staff.
- ◆ E: Involve teens in volunteer opportunities and in planning programs for older children and teens.
- ◆ F: Evaluate current library space and former senior center office space to identify opportunities to provide additional event, meeting, and quiet space within our current building.
- ◆ G: Participate in the Village municipal facility needs study to explore options for additional library and community gathering space.

Goal 3

Support access to information in traditional and changing formats.



Objectives

- ◆ A: Maintain a robust physical materials collection of books, magazines, movies, and music.
- ◆ B: Increase access to digital formats by taking full advantage of library system and state-wide consortium opportunities to provide a wide selection of digital materials.
- ◆ C: Offer essential training and high-speed Internet access so all can skillfully participate in an increasingly online world.
- ◆ D: Create online digital access to local historical materials through partnerships with the Belleville Historical Society and state agencies.

Goal 4

Support the economic health of the community.



Objectives

- ◆ A: Support local business by drawing people downtown through increased program attendance and library use.
- ◆ B: Raise awareness of the Library as a small business resource center with office equipment, high speed Internet, and work space.
- ◆ C: Ensure that the Library has a robust collection and resources on small business management, career development, job search, test preparation, and entrepreneurship.
- ◆ D: Offer computer training to upgrade skills and job qualifications.
- ◆ E: Partner with the Chamber of Commerce to provide small business workshops for local businesses.

Goal 5

**Increase
community
awareness of
and support
for the Library.**



Objectives

- ◆ A: Develop a comprehensive marketing plan to better inform people about library services, programs, and other opportunities.
- ◆ B: Partner with school, civic, and social service organizations to create and promote events and programs both at the Library and out in the community.
- ◆ C: Actively reach out to new residents.
- ◆ D: Support the efforts of the Friends of the Belleville Public Library to involve community members as volunteers and advocates for the Library and to raise funds for library programs, services, and initiatives.
- ◆ E: Establish a library foundation to support the library's mission and future expansion.

Planning Process Elements

- **Establishment of a Strategic Planning Committee.** The committee consisted of five community members, the Library Director, and a professional consultant hired for facilitation and guidance.
- **Review of Current Library Status and Future Library Trends.** The Strategic Planning Committee began their research with an overview of the community's current library use and research into the trends and challenges facing libraries today. Area demographics were also reviewed.
- **Focus Groups.** With the goal of gaining a broad understanding of community needs, eight focus group sessions were held with a total of 65 people attending. Session participants included: social service providers (2 sessions), parents, youth services providers, senior citizens, library advocates, Kiwanis Club members, and local business people.
- **Community Survey.** Over 800 responses to the print and online community survey provided input from a broad cross-section of library users and non-users. In addition to category choice-type questions, there were multiple questions requesting open-ended responses. Spanish language surveys were also available.
- **Staff In-Service.** Staff met for a half-day session to identify community needs and ways the Library could meet those needs based on staff members' knowledge from working with the public.
- **Identification of Goals and Objectives.** Based on the above input, the Strategic Planning Committee developed five strategic goals with accompanying objectives for 2015-2018.
- **Final Plan Development.** The Strategic Planning Committee summarized the process and conclusions into a written plan which was presented to the Library's Board of Trustees on July 13, 2015.



Themes from Community Input

An essential premise of Belleville Public Library's strategic planning process was that the Library's primary purpose is to serve the community. Therefore, we listened at length to small groups of residents, both users and non-users. The results of these Focus Groups helped us design the community-wide survey. Residents were generous and open about what they thought, both positive and negative.

Major themes identified were:

- The Library should be a ***community gathering place*** to bring people together for classes, programs, and services.
- To achieve its goals, the Library should ***work together in partnership*** with other community organizations.
- People value the ***sense of community*** and want opportunities to volunteer and work together to solve local problems.
- ***More meeting space*** is needed for community group and business use.
- There was strong support for ***our children's educational success*** and a desire for the Library to provide enrichment opportunities.
- ***Computer literacy and access to computers*** are increasingly important for day-to-day life. There were many requests for help with computer and tablet skills.
- Children and younger teens need ***a place to go*** and engage in worthwhile activities, especially after school and as an alternative to sports.
- Concern was expressed about meeting the ***needs of an aging and more culturally diverse population***.

"The community needs a center, a heart, and anchor. It should be in a central location. The library should be the hub."

"Internet access is so important. It is great that the library provides that access. Our rural Internet can be intermittent & for many, it is still unaffordable."

- Many requested *more comfortable furnishings* and a more attractive space in general. Natural lighting was important. “Cramped” and “uninviting” were words used to describe the current facility.
- A significant number of *misunderstandings or lack of knowledge* about the Library and its services were discovered. For example, 42% of the survey respondents did not know that e-books and downloadable audiobooks were available from the Library. Fifty-seven percent of respondents to the survey had never visited the Library’s website. Additionally, comments revealed that some people were unaware of the basement level, the elevator, and programs and classes already offered by the Belleville Public Library.
- Belleville area residents *clearly value their library*. Over 96% of respondents, even those who did not use the Belleville Public Library, said that having a public library is important to the quality of life in a community.
- Comments indicated *great satisfaction with current library services*, especially in the areas of children’s programs and services along with the friendly, helpful staff. As one respondent said, “The staff does a terrific job considering the space limitations.”

“I support any effort to keep and expand the library. I am not a frequent user, but libraries are vital to the health and vibrancy of any community.”

Input from Infrequent and Non-Users

The committee was especially interested in learning reasons for low or non-use of the library. Primary multiple-choice reasons given for not using Belleville Public Library were “not needing anything from the library” (40%) and “not having time to use the library” (34%). Given that many seemed unaware of the range of services offered, it is possible that those not needing anything from the library might hold a different opinion after taking the survey.

“I really like the always helpful staff and admire their efforts to provide the best facility and service they can. Our library is a lively and welcoming space.”

Reasons those who used other libraries cited were convenient location and hours, a more spacious library, and services not available at Belleville, which included attending specific events of interest, wider selection of materials, and meeting rooms.

Teen Library User Input

Those who have used the Belleville Public Library in the past year have:

- 89% Borrowed a book or magazine
- 64% Borrowed a CD, DVD, or audiobook
- 26% Used a library computer
- 13% Used the library's Wi-Fi
- 31% Used the photocopier or fax
- 26% Brought a child to a program

We value the viewpoints offered by the 9th, 10th, and 11th graders who took the survey as part of their school day. We learned that 48% had visited the library in the past year, with 39% visiting monthly or more often. Two thirds of teen library users had borrowed reading materials. Between a quarter to a third indicated a high interest in things like small study group rooms, a separate teen area, and hands-on opportunities to learn things like coding, robotics, and 3-D printing.

Library Programming

Many ideas for more and a wider variety of programming came through clearly in both the focus groups and the survey. Although there was no one topic that dominated the requests, significant numbers indicated interest in programs on financial planning, health information, computer use, gardening, small business management, and arts and crafts.

That many could benefit from computer training was identified early on in the focus groups. The requests for computer training ranged from absolute beginner classes to more advanced topics like website development, coding, and 3-D printing. Skill in navigating the Internet has become a necessity for many day-to-day tasks. Due to the immediate need, the Library began in December 2014 to offer several well-attended computer classes for beginners each month.



Numerous comments reflected support for the library-hosted community events. Survey responses recognized the Library's sponsorship of the successful Music in the Park concert series and encouraged additional programs to bring the community together.

Requests for More Space

Overwhelmingly, the greatest number of oral and written comments requested a larger library with more space for a wide variety of needs. Of the 334 comments made in response to the survey question *"If you could make any changes to the library, what would they be?"* 204 respondents directly said that they wanted a larger library or they asked for things requiring more floor space like meeting rooms, quiet space, and room for additional computers.

A majority of survey respondents indicated a high or medium desire for each of these uses:

- an enclosed, quiet reading area (72%),
- small study, group or meeting rooms (74%),
- a separate area for teens (67%),
- a large community room (58%), and
- meeting space available for small business or community group use (67%).

"Expand the library to allow more places for reading, studying, working with others as well as additional places for books, movies, music, and computers. The library right now is so small it is not a very welcoming place to relax and read or study."



To begin to address this need for meeting and program space, the Library will be renovating the former Senior Center office which became available in June 2015. Our gathered input guided the decision of how this additional space will be used. The new space will provide a closed room for programs and classes. It will be used as a quiet reading area when not needed for library events.

A Well-Used Community Resource

Heading into the future, the Belleville Public Library has a strong track record to build upon. Our community averages annual use of 25.1 books, DVDs, and other items per resident compared to the Dane County average of 17.6 per resident and statewide average of 10.7 per resident in 2013. The Library has built an excellent youth program serving toddlers through teens. Almost half of all items checked out are juvenile materials. During the summer almost 400 children and teens developed their reading skills by participating in our seven week summer reading program. Last year, 2,348 children and teens attended the 84 fun, educational activities and performances sponsored by the Library.

In 2014, cultural performances, book discussions, and classes sponsored by the Library were attended by 1,812 people. Taking library programs to the people through sponsorship and participation in community events, such as Music in the Park and LakeFest, have been well-received by residents.



Although our physical collection is limited by space considerations, membership in the South Central Library System (SCLS) provides Belleville residents with access to the same wealth of shared library materials available to those living in larger communities. Belleville library patrons appreciate convenient daily delivery of requested items. Of the 81,608 books and other items borrowed in 2014 from our library, just over one third (27,495) were from other SCLS libraries.

While the availability and convenience of digital formats, such as e-books and streaming video, continue to grow, many people will still prefer traditional books or may lack the Internet capacity at home to

Average Use per Resident

Belleville	25.1
Dane County	17.6
State-wide	10.7

"The Belleville Public Library is a gem in our little community. I have been a regular and devoted patron for over 40 years."... "The library is an institution that positively impacts the lives of the residents of the Village, providing services, materials, and facilities that contribute to the betterment of society."

effectively use digital formats. Providing free Wi-Fi, access to computers, and computer training will continue to be essential services.

Looking to the Future

The Belleville Public Library, like many libraries throughout the country, is transitioning to new ways of serving our community. We now have a well-informed strategic plan for the near future. During these next few years, we will build on our strengths and respond to what we discovered in this planning effort. We will strive to enhance and expand Library services to our community to the best of our ability within the limits of our current location. Given our better understanding of the needs and desires of the community, we will continue to explore options for additional library and community gathering space. The Village's evaluation of the Library as part of their municipal facility needs study is a significant first step toward understanding twenty-year space needs, site options, and potential for shared municipal facilities.



Beyond the near future, we can be certain that there will be even more dramatic change in how information is created and distributed, which will impact how citizens learn and live in a digital world. Along with these changes, the expectations of what people want from their library will evolve. So will we. What will remain constant is Belleville Public Library's commitment to support the quality of life in our community.

THANK YOU!

The Library Board of Trustees is extremely grateful to the members of the Strategic Planning Committee, to all of the participants in the focus groups, and the hundreds of area residents who took their time to fill out the Library's community survey. Special thanks are expressed to Bronna Lehmann for her tireless work and leadership and to Laura V. Page for her facilitation and guidance.

Acknowledgements

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- Bonnie Wilcox, Village Board Representative

Strategic Planning Team

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- Heidi Clark (5/14 – 8/14)
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- Karen Stremikis (joined 9/14)
- Linda Schmitt (joined 9/14)
- Bronna Lehmann, Library Director
- Laura V. Page, Consultant/Facilitator

Other Contributors

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- The many local businesses who helped raise awareness and increase participation in our community survey by posting information at their place of business.
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Additional information on our strategic planning process is available at the Belleville Public Library or www.bellevillelibrary-wi.org