

# **Matawan Aberdeen Public Library Strategic Plan 2015-2020**

## **Strategic Planning Committee Members:**

Diane Jones, Board President

Marla Sieman, Board First Vice President

Kathleen Eovino, Board Second Vice President

Susan Quinn, Board Member

Laura Beyer, Staff Member

Jennifer Fisher, Staff Member

Jill Stafford, Staff Member

Kimberly Paone, Library Director

Consultant: Eileen Palmer, LMxAC

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## **Planning Process**

In 2015 the Library Board created a Strategic Planning Committee to review and update the Library's Strategic Plan. The Committee consisted of Board Members, the Library Director and Library Staff. The Library was assisted in the process by LMxAC. The process included a review of current library usage, library trends, community needs and community trends. In addition to the research conducted by the Committee, a survey of residents of Matawan and Aberdeen was conducted. 277 residents responded to the survey over a six week period in early 2015. The plan was developed by analyzing all of this data. While many of the activities in the 2008-2012 Library Strategic Plan are still relevant today, this document focuses on strategic directions for the future and how best to address current community needs and developing areas of library service.

## **History of the Matawan Aberdeen Public Library**

The history of the Matawan Aberdeen Public Library dates back 112 years to 1903 when the Matawan Free Public Library was opened 7 hours a week in a rented space. By 1921, the library moved to the corner of Main Street and Park Avenue. In 1962 the Borough and Township formed a joint library and by 1967 a new 2,800 square foot library was opened on the current site.

As the two communities continued to experience growth through the 1960s and 1970s, plans were quickly developed to add another 2,000 square feet to the library which became the Children's Wing. This also included a basement. In 1985, a two story addition was constructed which added 4000 square feet. The lower level is the current children's area. The expanded facility is 9,880 square feet.

## **Demographics**

The combined service population for the library is stable at about 27,000. 80% of the population is Caucasian but the population has become more diverse over the last 10 years. Those groups aged 45 to 80 have increased in recent years. Home turnover rates for both Matawan and Aberdeen are lower than the state average while median income is higher. English remains the dominant language spoken in the home although there is a growing Spanish language constituency.

## **Library Budget**

The library's budget is based on a 1/3 mill in equalized property tax values and has seen significant decreases over the last 7 years as the ratable base declined. Absorbing a decrease in revenue of more than 12% is difficult for any organization. Through careful stewardship of its existing funds, both for general operations and for capital needs, MAPL has been able to maintain current service levels with minimum interruption to service. The Board and Library staff will have significant challenges at least in the near future in order to maintain existing service levels due to anticipated budget constraints. Hours were cut in 2014 and staffing has dropped from 34 to 28 (equivalent to the loss of 1 FTE).

## **Library Collection and Use**

In 2009 the MAPL collection consisted primarily of physical materials including print and AV. The collection totaled just under 68,000 items. Today the library has access to a collection of 73,000 physical items and 67,000 digital materials – many of which are part of shared collections to which the library belongs. The MAPL has clearly prioritized developing digital collections but have not sacrificed the physical collection in order to do so. A balance between physical and digital materials will be the cornerstone of the public library for many years to come as our patrons demand equally of both formats.

Combined circulation of materials (physical and digital) has been flat since 2009. MAPL's circulation of digital items has increased by more than 700%. Registered patrons have increased by 25%. MAPL participates in a consortium of libraries from Middlesex, Monmouth and Union counties called LMxAC. Borrowing from other consortium members has increased by 23% since 2009.

## **Resident Survey**

277 residents completed a survey during the spring of 2015 to provide input to the Strategic Planning Committee. Here is a summary of the survey results:

- MAPL is highly valued by current users who appreciate the staff, collection, programs and ability to access other collections and libraries.
- While borrowing physical library materials remains the most popular use of MAPL, programming, access to the Internet and access to digital materials are growing services that are also valued.
- Library users acknowledge the physical limitations of the existing building but appreciate how well the space is currently being used.
- A significant portion of library users surveyed indicated they were not aware of library services such as programming, databases and digital content.

- Survey respondents indicated interest in a wide variety of programs encouraging the Library to expand programming services.
- There is a strong interest in the library creating a Community Technology Advisory Board, (including several residents who have already volunteered to serve).
- There is strong interest in strengthening MAPL's role in fostering community 'connectedness' and serving as an intellectual and community center.

## **Vision**

The Matawan Aberdeen Public Library is a key community partner in literacy, lifelong learning, information technology, cultural enhancement and citizen engagement for the communities it serves.

## **Mission**

The Matawan Aberdeen Public Library is a vital community center focusing on providing traditional and innovative library services. We do so by continually enhancing our three greatest resources—our staff, our collections, and our space (physical and virtual). By carefully using and developing these resources we actively promote and support reading, literacy, information technology, lifelong learning, cultural enhancement and citizen engagement.

## **Strategic Directions**

After reviewing the research and survey results, Strategic Plan Committee members turned their attention to looking at trends in library services and where those trends intersected with community needs. Strengths of the Library, including its staff, its expanded access to digital content, the role it serves within both communities, and its understanding of the needs of its residents lead to the development of four strategic directions for the Library which are described below.

## **Community Activities Center**

Public libraries are places where community members come together to learn, do business, educate their children and, increasingly, socialize and meet. Often it can be the only place in a community for people to engage directly in this time of more and more social media-induced isolation. Survey respondents indicated an interest in seeing MAPL serve a more active role in this capacity. Building on and expanding MAPL's current services to a variety of populations (adults, teens, children) with the Community Activities Center role in mind is an important opportunity for MAPL and is embraced by the Board and the Staff.

### **Popular Materials Center**

A traditional, and still vital, role of the public library is to serve as a popular materials center. This is a current strength of MAPL and there is a strong desire to maintain it as such.

### **Preschool Door to Learning**

Early childhood literacy is also a strength of the public library. More important now than ever, libraries can provide the crucial support to parents in their efforts to assure their children begin a love of learning with books and reading. Library collections and programming play an important, well-documented, role in preparing children to be lifelong readers and lifelong learners.

### **Independent Learning Center**

Perhaps one of the newest and most promising roles for the public library is in serving adults as lifelong learners. Experts predict that people will increasingly be required to retool and retrain to remain competitive in the job market and the library, sometimes referred to as the 'people's University,' is well-suited to assist in that task.

For MAPL to be successful in meeting the needs of its residents in each of the areas listed above, the Board and Staff will need to rely on stable funding, strong leadership, an evolving technological infrastructure and supportive communities. The library will also need to re-evaluate how it promotes its services and look for ways to reach users of one library service when introducing another service. The goals and objectives identified in this plan are intended to guide the library in this strategic direction, but to provide enough flexibility to allow changes in emphasis and focus should conditions warrant. It is strongly encouraged that the Board review the plan annually and that the Staff also recommend updated objectives on an annual basis.

## Goals and Objectives

**Goal One:** Matawan Aberdeen Public Library will be able to deliver what people want to read, in the format people want to read it, in a reasonable amount of time.

Objectives:

- To be consistent in selecting both physical and digital materials based on reputable reviews, patron requests, and trends in circulation.
- To continue to have open resource sharing through the State Library, LMxAC, and LibraryLinkNJ.
- To market resources and services so that patrons and community members are aware of all MAPL activities.

**Goal Two:** The Matawan Aberdeen Public Library will be a community gathering place and activities center for the residents it serves. The library will continue to be a place to obtain local information, to participate in local community affairs, or to engage in lively and informative programming.

Objectives:

- To offer a variety of programming that provides opportunities for lifelong learning, personal enrichment, and civic engagement.
- To provide a safe and modern building and grounds that conform to all relevant codes and regulations for the enjoyment of our library patrons and community members.
- To market resources and services so that patrons and community members are aware of all MAPL activities.

**Goal Three:** The children and young adults served by the Matawan Aberdeen Public Library will see the library as a place for them to learn and grow.

Objectives:

- Along with local schools and other community partners, we will afford children the opportunity to explore early literacy activities, skills and exposure.
- The library will strengthen its role as service provider to our young people by continuing to explore new services for children and young adults.

- To market resources and services so that patrons and community members are aware of all MAPL activities.

**Goal Four:** The Matawan Aberdeen Public Library will provide residents of all ages the resources they need to meet both their personal lifelong learning needs and their professional/employment learning needs.

Objectives:

- We will provide access, training and support for existing and new technologies our residents use in everyday life to learn, read and explore.
- We will provide print and digital materials and resources to support lifelong learning within the library and through our online services.
- To market resources and services so that patrons and community members are aware of all MAPL activities.