

LEOMINSTER PUBLIC LIBRARY STRATEGIC PLAN 2024 – 2027

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INTRODUCTION

In September 2022, the Board of Trustees of the Leominster Public Library established a committee to gather information from the Leominster community and use that information to create a new multiyear strategic plan.

To do so, the Strategic Planning Committee conducted a survey, and held focus groups and interviews with members of the community. The information gathered was distilled and combined with staff and Committee input to create the following plan.

The themes, goals, and objectives that follow will guide the Library's next three years of service to the community. The library will return to these core priorities when developing yearly action plans.

The Strategic Planning Committee is grateful to the Board of Trustees for providing the time needed for the committee to identify and understand the needs of the community, to library staff for providing input earned through years of experience and service, and to members of the community for their thoughts and input. This plan was made by and for the Leominster community to ensure that the work of the library aligns with the needs of the community.

Alexander Lent
Library Director
March 2024

METHODOLOGY AND MAJOR RESULTS

The Strategic Planning Committee gathered community input through a general survey, focus groups with homeschooling families and teen patrons, and interviews with adult members of the community. Surveys and focus groups used the same questions, selected to encourage respondents to consider the community as a whole rather than the library exclusively. Short answer questions were preferred, in order to encourage in-depth responses and to avoid unnecessarily limiting participants' responses.

1. Please share some things that you like, love, and value most about Leominster.
2. What are some things you wish you could do in Leominster that you can't currently do here?
3. Do you use the Leominster Public Library?
4. Please share some reasons you don't use the library more often.
5. What would get you to use the library more often?
6. Does anything make it difficult for you to use the library? If so, please explain.
7. Please share some things that you like, love, and value most about the library.
8. Are there things you would like to be able to do, use, or see at the library that you currently can't?
9. How do you see the library contributing to the future of Leominster?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

This survey was available in the library and on the library's website, and was also posted on social media, and shared through the library's email list and through the email lists of partner organizations, including the Leominster Public Schools. An abbreviated list of questions, comprised of numbers 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10, was used for interviews conducted outside of a local grocery store. This setting enabled the Committee to reach members of the community who were not active library users.

To analyze the results, the Committee used an inductive method, allowing patterns to emerge from the responses, further enabling the community's input to drive the planning process. Responses were manually coded and grouped into broad categories or priorities. These priorities were then ranked by frequency and organized into themes. More specific goals were identified by the Committee and grouped within the priorities. The resulting themes, priorities, and objectives are the heart of the present plan.

Respondents indicated a great appreciation for Leominster's amenities and small town feel and identified library staff and collections as their two most important aspects of the library, with library events as a distant third. The

Children's Room was specifically identified as a strength. When asked what should be changed, the most popular answer was "nothing," followed by calls for more events, as well as a variety of requests for services that are already offered, indicating a need for more effective marketing of library offerings. Looking to the future, respondents see the library as an important space for education, events, technology, and resources, and a central hub for the community.

In the comment section, one resident provided what could be the basis for an effective vision for the library: "the library has kept up with the changes in Leominster. It is a beautiful, welcoming place, and has the community's interests at heart." These findings provide avenues for improvement while simultaneously suggesting that the library is already on the right path forward.

THEME: COMMUNITY

Priority 1: Continually assess and respond to community needs

Objective 1: Survey the broad Leominster community and conduct focus groups with major demographic and patron segments regularly

Objective 2: Provide patrons with easier and more visible access to a library feedback/suggestion system, both in the library and online

Objective 3: Solicit and collect comparative feedback following participation in library programs and services

Objective 4: Regularly and transparently review and evaluate feedback to identify community needs and identify ways to meet those needs

Objective 5: Provide public updates on library progress through strategic plan, action plan, and other goals

Priority 2: Increase community awareness of library collections, programs, and services

Objective 1: Establish marketing plan and branding guidelines to be consistently applied to all library communications

Objective 2: Identify and trial different avenues for information-sharing to reach the library's varied service populations

Priority 3: Ensure that the library's collections, programs, services, and communications are reflective of the multilingual community

Objective 1: Provide collections, events, and services in languages represented in Leominster

Objective 2: Produce library communications, both in print and digitally, in the languages represented in Leominster

THEME: LIBRARY MANAGEMENT

Priority 1: Ensure that the grounds, building, and individual spaces of the library continue to meet the evolving needs of the community

Objective 1: Conduct building usage assessments regularly

Objective 2: Design and install wayfinding signage throughout the library

Objective 3: Explore ways to capitalize on the library's limited outdoor spaces

Priority 2: Ensure that the policies and procedures of the library are up to date and reflective of the needs and realities of the library and community

Objective 1: Regularly review all library policies and procedures in a committee format

Objective 2: Revise existing policies and procedures and establish new policies and procedures as needed

Objective 3: Gather data, literature, best practices, and community input on and explore the need for library overdue fines

Objective 4: Review library hours of operation with an eye for consistency and accessibility

Priority 3: Ensure that library staff have the skills, training, and resources to be successful

Objective 1: Provide training in languages represented in Leominster

Objective 2: Provide training in customer service, technology, and other key skills

Objective 3: Ensure that staff are up to date on both library and community information and resources

Priority 4: Ensure that the library has adequate funding for current and future services

Objective 1: Expand the library's grant-writing efforts

Objective 2: Provide library sponsorship and donation opportunities for individuals and organizations

THEME: LIBRARY EVENTS, RESOURCES, AND SERVICES

Priority 1: Expand event offerings based on community input

Objective 1: Trial different scheduling, frequency, and marketing of events

Objective 2: Look for patterns of success in historic practice

Priority 2: Increase the visibility and appeal of library collections

Objective 1: Trial different display options, techniques, and locations

Objective 2: Explore collection reorganization and dynamic shelving

Priority 3: Ensure that the library's technology offerings meet the needs of the community

Objective 1: Trial additional technologies for public use

Objective 2: Explore expanded self-checkout options

Objective 3: Provide patrons with opportunities to build technology skills

Priority 4: Expand library services beyond 30 West Street

Objective 1: Provide library services at locations throughout the community on a regular schedule

Objective 2: Expand delivery of library materials to residents unable to travel to the library

Objective 3: Expand partnerships with local organizations

Objective 4: Increase library participation in community events

Objective 5: Provide robust digital access to library collections and events

ABOUT THE CITY OF LEOMINSTER

Leominster, located in North Central Massachusetts, is the second largest city in Worcester County, with a population of 43,782 at the 2020 Census, a 7.4% growth since 2010. 62% of residents are between the ages of 18 and 64, with the remaining 38% of residents evenly split between residents under 18 (19%) and residents 65 and older (19%).

71% of residents are White alone (not Hispanic or Latino), 6.5% are Black or African American alone, 3% are Asian alone, 14% are Hispanic or Latino, and 10% are Two or More Races. Nearly 15% of Leominster residents were born in countries other than the United States. 22% of residents speak a language other than English at home, with Spanish and Portuguese particularly common.

Due to its population size and disparities between local and state economic and educational metrics, Leominster was designated by the Massachusetts Legislature in 2010 as one of the Commonwealth's 26 Gateway Cities. As a Gateway City, Leominster "face[s] stubborn social and economic challenges,"¹ but as a vibrant regional anchor of social, economic, and cultural assets, is teeming with potential.

¹ About the Gateway Cities, MassInc.org: <https://massinc.org/our-work/policy-center/gateway-cities/about-the-gateway-cities/>

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LEOMINSTER PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Leominster Social Library began in 1763 with approximately 100 books, which were kept in a pine secretary in the study of [local First Church minister] Reverend Francis Gardner. The secretary was later given to the Library Committee by Reverend Gardner's granddaughter and is now on permanent display beside the Information Desk on the Library's second floor.

In the spring of 1856, the town voted to accept a collection of books from the Leominster Lyceum Library, to appropriate \$75.00 to support the Free Public Library for that year, and to appoint a five-member library committee. This committee, in turn, hired its first librarian in June 1856.

The Public Library's collection was by turns housed in a store, an office, and a room in the old Town Hall. Finally, in 1908, the town voted to accept a gift of \$27,500 from Andrew Carnegie to build a new library building. The library opened in 1910 in its current location. In 1967, it opened a 10,000-square-foot addition with 61,669 volumes.

In early 2005, the Leominster Public Library began work on a major renovation of the facility. This project included restoration of the library's historic 1910 building, demolition of the 1967 addition, and construction of a new three-story, 34,434-square-foot addition. The newly renovated and expanded building opened on June 10, 2007, with a public dedication and ribbon cutting that was attended by an enthusiastic crowd of nearly 700 people. One of the guest speakers, Leominster native and author Adriane Nicole LeBlanc noted that "The library is a hopeful thing, built and sustained by people who love books, and love what happens in their company, who know the importance of what we say and how we say it, who recognize that democracy thrives in places like this."

The library's annual report for 2008 proudly declared that "Demand for services in the newly expanded and renovated library [has] skyrocketed. Increases [include]: circulation up 50%; meeting room use up 290%; public computer use and information requests up 60%; interlibrary loan up 70%." The Robert Cormier Center for Young Adults and the Dr. Martin T. Feldman Children's Room welcomed teens and children and their families in larger, dynamic spaces with expanded computer access and gaming stations for teens. The library's new Community Room allowed for a diverse range of programs to be presented for all ages, including concerts, lectures, film screenings and more. Additional public computers and wi-fi throughout the building enabled patrons to use the Internet to meet their basic informational needs, with the realization that for many members of the community who cannot afford computers, the library is their way to bridge the "digital information divide". The library's collection of artwork, historic maps, and

photographs are now displayed in a beautiful building that offers plenty of space for reading and studying as well as a Local History Room for genealogists and researchers. One of the most popular features of the new building remains the availability of private study rooms, which are also used for small meetings and tutoring sessions.

In 2010, the library celebrated the 100th anniversary of the original 1910 Carnegie building with a series of programs, including an all-ages after-hours “scavenger hunt” and participation in the city’s “Summer Stroll”. Folks had a great time watching (and riding) the High Wheel Bicycles, wrestling in Sumo Wrestling suits, jumping rope with the Beantown Jumpers, enjoying free popcorn and lemonade, and playing old-fashioned games in the air-conditioned Library building while viewing the “It’s 1910 Again” Exhibit. The culminating event was a concert in the fall featuring ragtime music and noting the century mark for the library, Leominster’s Colonial Band, and artist Louis Charpentier.

The next nine years saw the growth of the library as the heart of the community and a place for all kinds of innovative programs to be offered and many partnerships to flourish. Book discussion groups, after-hours events for teens, a monthly “Film Night for Grownups”, an expanded tax assistance program, genealogy help sessions, and community art exhibits were just some of the many programs presented. Partnerships with Fitchburg State University, the Leominster Public Schools, Leominster’s 4History Group, the AARP, the Central MA Genealogical Society, and many other community organizations continued to enrich what the library was able to offer.

The library debuted its “Library of Things”, a collection of non-traditional items for loan including ukeleles, gaming systems, Wi-fi hotspots, Chromebooks, and much more. Grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and Mass Humanities allowed patrons to experience the “Lincoln and the Civil War” and “The Chinese and the Iron Road” exhibits in the library. The digitization of the Leominster High School Yearbook Collection and the contents of the “1915 City Hall Time Capsule” were accomplished through the Digital Commonwealth; work continues to digitize the local newspaper, the *Leominster Enterprise*, which is now available online via the website from its inception in 1873 through 1975.

And then, in 2020, the world changed. The Mayor of the City of Leominster ordered all municipal buildings, including the library, closed to the public as of March 17, 2020, at 5:00 pm. The very next day staff began brainstorming ways to serve patrons during the closure. The library extended wi-fi access to cover the library parking lot, expanded online resources, created a Youtube page to host virtual story times for children, developed procedures for virtual library card sign-ups, instituted a “pen pal program” with handwritten notes to many

regular library patrons, offered programs for the public via Zoom, and handed out “care packages” at local schools during their food distribution sessions. The library began “curbside pickup” of materials along with take-home craft kits for all ages in May of 2020 and reopened the adult department first floor for browsing by appointment in July. The Children’s Room reopened for browsing in November, and in April of 2021 all floors were available for browsing and study rooms reopened. By that time, no appointments were necessary, but greeters kept a count of all people in the building, per state occupancy guidelines. In June of 2021 seating and computer workstations became available and we added evening hours until 7:00 pm and Saturday hours until 1:00 pm. In the fall of 2021, the library welcomed patrons back with all services and hours restored and began offering in-person programs once again.

The Leominster Public Library prided itself on providing consistent, safe, and ever-increasing service to the Leominster community in the face of the tremendous challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. During that time, staff also reorganized the collections on the top two floors to make it easier and faster for patrons to find materials, expanded our “Library of Things”, debuted a new logo and branding, and launched a new website.

In 2022, the library purchased a van and launched a new “Mobile Library”, which has allowed us to hold “pop-up library” events throughout the city as well as expand outreach services to the Leominster Senior Center and assisted living facilities.

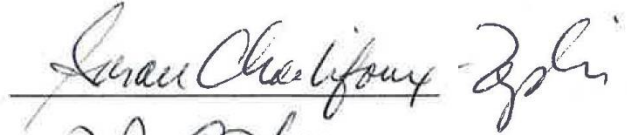
The Leominster Public Library is not just a quaint relic or a terminus of a wire: it is a place where community is created and sustained and, for many people, provides occupational and educational support and is at the center of how they spend their free time.

APPROVED BY VOTE
OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
OF THE LEOMINSTER PUBLIC LIBRARY,
APRIL 8, 2024

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