Southington Public Library

Looking Ahead 2.0

Long Range Strategic Plan: 2016 - 2019

Susan Smayda, Executive Director
8/8/2016

Executive Summary

In 2010 the Library completed a comprehensive Long Range Plan. This plan yielded a new mission for the Library - *The Southington Library is Southington's community center and premier resource for information, life-long learning and cultural enrichment* and, with abundant input from the community, it laid out a major long-term goal to build a new 21st Century library.

> Plan and Build a Bigger Library - To satisfy the needs of the Community the Library Board must obtain a larger, efficiently designed library thereby creating an environment conducive to improved services. To accomplish this major effort the following steps need to be taken:
> - architectural and engineering studies must be made,
> - funding has to be found and obtained, and
> - the public and the funding authorities must agree to support the Library Board's commitment to renovating the library and adding an addition that corrects the deficiencies of the current building.

Southington Library is now poised to begin a new era of service to the citizens of our town. We have been working with the architectural firm of Tai Soo Kim for the past 4 years to design a bigger, better library for our community. In November of 2014 the Library received a $1,000,000 construction grant to expand the current 21,000 sq. ft. building to 43,000 sq. ft. Early estimates for the cost of the addition and renovation are $13,000,000. A town-wide referendum is scheduled for November 2017.

At the end of 2015 the Southington Library Board started making plans to create a new long range strategic plan to complete the goal of building a new and improved library. The consulting firm of Maxine Bleiweis & Associates was hired to conduct focus groups and a community forum to gather input and make recommendations based on the data gathered.

Focus groups were held with active seniors, middle school students, members of the business community, parents of preschoolers, and members of the Library Board of Directors between February and May 2016. An open community forum was held on May 26, 2016.

During the month of February 2016 the Library converted The Gallery, normally used to display artwork into a "Community Speakout Wall." Almost 200 respondents posted opinion about the Town of Southington. [see Appendix

After studying the data gathered at the focus groups the following recommendations were made by the consultants:

Position library as "community center" – while the mission states "Southington Library is Southington's community center and premier resource for information, lifelong learning, and cultural enrichment", this is not reflected in the focus group participants' perception of the library. Take the key topics that were identified as Southington's issues and convene forums on those issues. Establish the library as a key resource for any community conversations and as a presence at key community gatherings.

Collaborate with community partners - Identify partners who have the attention and trust of the community and reach outside the walls of the library to be a presence and convener. Survey library board members and staff to gather information about their existing partnerships and community involvement.

Communications and marketing plan – Develop a communications and marketing plan with the goal of all Southington residents being made aware of the library's many services. Reassess current marketing tools and methods of communication with the public to ensure that key groups are being reached.

Evaluate current programs to ensure relevance to community needs –In order to take on new endeavors, existing services and activities have to be examined for relevance and staff resource deployment. Define target populations, with a focus on underserved populations, and prioritize programming to reach those who are not current users.

Refresh existing spaces - Because a renovation of the library is still years away, we would recommend finding low or no-cost ways to refresh existing spaces, particularly the small program room in the children's area. Establish areas to "beta test" new furnishings, services, and offerings in conjunction with key community partners.

Build expansion campaign readiness - Identify all of the critical individuals and organizations that need to be informed, educated, and transformed into advocates for library expansion. Establish methods for soliciting and accepting cash and stock contributions from the community. Develop messaging to engage and excite the community and provide regular opportunities to meet with constituent groups, such as parents of young children, the business community, and town leaders.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Final Report Submitted by Maxine Bleiweis & Associates, LLC,
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1a - Focus Group & Community Forum report

Background and Methodology

In December 2015, Maxine Bleiweis & Associates was selected to conduct focus groups and a community forum as part of Southington Library & Museum's long-range planning process. Following conversations with Sue Smayda, Library Director, and Mary Ellen D'Angelo, Chair of the Board of Directors, focus groups were held with active seniors, middle school students, members of the business community, and parents of preschoolers between February and May 2016. An open community forum was held on May 26, 2016.

Questions were developed for each group to help the library understand the needs of different segments of Southington's population and how the library can meet those needs. [Questions for each group are located in Appendix A.]. Summaries of the focus groups are presented separately below, followed by a summary of the Community Forum. Recommendations based on analysis of the focus groups and Community Forum are presented at the end of the body of this document.

Appendix 1b. **Focus Group Summaries**

Focus Group 1: Active Seniors
This focus group was held at the Southington YMCA on February 18, 2016. Seven participants attended, two men and five women.

The individuals in attendance agreed that Southington is a "nice place to be," with several commenting on liking their neighbors and the community overall. Looking forward a few years, participants are anticipating changes due to mobility issues, but want to remain in their homes and in the community. Many of the active seniors are still hoping to travel and to see their grandchildren celebrate important milestones (e.g. graduate college, get married).
They are also looking to get their affairs in order by handling paperwork and taxes, as well as cleaning out closets and other items that have been collected over the years. Five of the seven participants use a computer or a tablet, and primarily use them to Skype or Facetime with family, play games, and use sites such as eBay. Most stay local for entertainment or leisure activities.

When asked about the library, the staff were mentioned as an excellent resource, but a participant also commented that the library building is too small for the town. Participants were unaware of some of the services offered, including how to download books to their devices.

Focus Group questions – Active Seniors
1. Why do you live in Southington? What's important about it to you?
2. In the next few years, what do you think might change in your life?
3. What's on your to-do list that you just can't seem to get off the list?
4. What do you do when you use your computer?
5. Where do you go for entertainment? Where do you go when you want to learn something new? Why those places?
6. Tell me about the first time you were in a public library
7. When you think of Southington's public library, what words come to mind? What words do you wish came to mind?
8. What would be the most important achievement of Southington's public library by the end of five years?

Focus Group 2: Middle School students

This focus group was held on February 18, 2016 at Joseph A. DePaolo Middle School. There were 12 middle school students in attendance evenly representing each grade and gender.

Students were asked where they like to go to hang out with their friends. Many responded that they like to go to the mall to learn about new equipment and trends rather than to purchase items. Others mentioned going to Panthorn Park and trampoline parks. Students shared a wide variety of interests, including art, music, sports, making/designing clothing, and doing outdoor activities. To learn more about their interests, they turn to family members, social media, and other online sources such as YouTube and Google.

Through their interests, students described the content that they create, such as making movies, writing stories and poems, using a 3D printer, sewing, and playing musical instruments. Most of the students prefer reading print books over eBooks due to screen fatigue, enjoying the feel of physical books, and the ability to see the progress they are making. Many said that the books they read are purchased for them at bookstores or online.

Most of the students said that what keeps them from using the library on a regular basis is that they are too busy. They also indicated that they did not have the expectation that the library had services and programs that were responsive to their interests. Several said that the last time they visited was with a younger sibling who was there to pick out a book or attend a program.

The library was described as a potential good central meeting place to work on group projects. When asked to imagine the "best possible library," participants developed the following list: food available/café (said by many), different types of spaces for quiet study and group meetings, technology that they can't get at home, comfortable furniture, more classes, art groups, reading groups, technology groups, and a space that feels open with a lot of light.

Focus Group questions – middle schoolers
1. What stores or places to eat do you really like? Why do you like them? Where do you go to hang out with your friends?
2. What are you interested in? Where do you go to learn more about your interests?
3. What kind of content do you create? Would you be willing to share what you create with others?
4. What keeps you from using the library more?
5. What would make Southington's public library the best possible library?

Focus Group 3: Business community

The focus group was held on March 31, 2016 at the Southington Chamber of Commerce. There were ten individuals in attendance, including business owners and managers.

When asked about the challenges that they have overcome, and those that they are facing in the near future, participants talked about business restructuring, personnel changes, dealing with changes in regulations, the uncertainty of the state budget, and transitions to retirement. Participants expressed a desire for the town to support business by focusing on local investment in merchants and landlords, improving the look of the town (specifically downtown Plantsville), and using a "complete streets" model to improve health and wellness. They also discussed the need for greater communication and coordination among businesses and community partners.

Like the middle school students, lack of time was described and perceived as the key factor in keeping participants from using the library. A lack of awareness of the services offered was also a barrier. Participants recommended that the library offer business-focused programming such as opportunities to connect new business owners with existing ones, "soft skills" job training, and "business after hours" networking. Partnerships with STEPS and Youth Services were also mentioned as ways to make the library more connected to other.

Focus Group questions – business community
1. What challenge were you most proud of being able to conquer in the last six months?
2. What challenges lie ahead for you?
3. If the community could provide one or two things to help your business, what would that be?
4. If the library were to offer any of these services, what barriers would it have to overcome for you to use the services?

Focus Group 4: Parents of preschoolers

This focus group was held on May 18, 2016 at the Southington Library. Seven parents, grandparents, and/or caregivers of preschoolers attended while their children were participating in the music program downstairs.

Participants shared their reasons for living in Southington, largely centering on an appreciation of all it has to offer as a small town, including the schools, sports, business community, and family activities. When asked what they look for in deciding where to bring their children for activities, the following characteristics were mentioned: activities for different ages, including a safe space for older children so that the caregiver can do activities with a younger child; safety

and easy sight lines; cleanliness; easy access to changing tables; and the ability for kids to run around safely. Spaces with both indoor and outdoor areas with stimulating activities were described in responses to a question about the perfect place to take their child; children's museums were frequently cited.

Participants expressed a desire for the library to offer more guidance on the use of electronic devices with their children, including programs on how to determine which apps and games are best for each age group. When asked about what they would change about the Southington Library, participants recommended offering more social programs to allow parents to meet one another.

While they commended the children's department staff, all wished for updated spaces for children to play, additionally stating that the separate room designated for young children is severely inadequate and uninviting, coupled with no sight lines for supervision of older children. They also advocated for better chairs and couches to sit on and read to their children, and lower bookshelves to improve accessibility and sight lines. Examples of spaces that met their needs included the public libraries in Plainville, Farmington, and Granby as well as children's museums in Bristol and Torrington. They also discussed a "Southington Reads"-type program for children that could be offered four times per year and include author talks. Eliminating or changing the format of the registration fee and increased partnerships with other trusted organizations – YMCA/Camp Sloper, Parks and Recreation department, and the Family Resource Center – were also mentioned.

Focus Group questions – parents of preschoolers
1. What brought you to Southington and what keeps you here?
2. When you want to go somewhere with your children, what's your biggest consideration?
3. If you could dream up the perfect place you take your child, what would it be?
4. How much time do you spend reading, singing, and playing games with your children on a given day?
5. Where do you find suggestions for what to read, sing, or play?
6. What role do electronic devices play in this? Do you use them or your kids or both?
7. What would you change about the Southington public library?

Appendix 1c. **Community Forum Summary**

A Community Forum was held on May 26, 2016 in the downstairs meeting room at Southington Library. Twenty people attended.

The forum began with a brief presentation on the role of the public library and different ways that libraries are successfully facing the challenges that impact their communities. Participants were then asked to work with the people sitting at their tables to discuss the biggest issues in Southington. After narrowing down the issues, each of the four groups were assigned one issue and asked to brainstorm ideas for how to address that issue. Finally, all participants were asked to share words that they would use to describe the Southington library of the future. Below is a list of the most important issues (presented in no particular order), as selected by the participants, and ideas to address them:

Substance abuse (opioid addiction for younger people and older adults):
- Create a public forum about the topic with participation by experts in treatment, people in recovery, parents/family members, and law enforcement officers.

Lack of public transportation:
- Expand senior center busing
- Explore partnerships with private vans and taxi services
- Provide transportation from other parts of town to the commuter parking lot for connection to CTfastrak
- Create bike/Segway rental program
- Create ride share system

Lack of connection to community resources:
- Increase awareness of existing resources through communication outlets (e.g. newspapers)
- Create a centralized hub for information
- Use the library email list to do brief monthly surveys on issues in town; present information gathered to key stakeholders (e.g. town council, board of education)

Overdevelopment/Rapid development:
- Hold forum to share the town development plan that goes beyond zoning
- Consider "smart" development principles (e.g. as part of developments over a certain size, create "microneighborhoods" that are walkable/bikeable and have access to stores)
- Consider traffic flow

Other issues that were raised included a lack of senior housing, lack of downtown parking and shopping, and awareness of economic/food insecurity issues.

When asked for words to describe the future library, three main categories emerged: space, amenities, and programming. Under space, participants would like a bright and open building with different size rooms/multi-meeting ability that includes a kitchen, community space, stage/auditorium, lots of electrical outlets, accessible, and rooms for quiet study. Participants are looking for the library to offer the latest technology, digital projects, food, comfortable chairs, fast wifi, more printers, and to be open on Sundays. They wanted to see frequent innovative, entertaining, and free programs and activities.

Community Forum questions
1.   What are the three biggest issues facing your community?
2.   What are ideas to address those issues?
3.   What ideas did you like best that you heard tonight?
4.   What words describe your community's future library?

Appendix 1d. **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made with an eye toward building community support for a referendum to fund building expansion in fall 2017, understanding that expanding programming is an issue due to lack of space.

- o **Build expansion campaign readiness** - Identify all of the critical individuals and organizations that need to be informed, educated, and transformed into advocates for library expansion. Establish methods for soliciting and accepting cash and stock contributions from the community. Develop messaging to engage and excite the community and provide regular opportunities to meet with constituent groups, such as parents of young children, the business community, and town leaders.

- o **Communications and marketing plan** – Develop a communications and marketing plan with the goal of all Southington residents being made aware of the library's many services. Reassess current marketing tools and methods of communication with the public to ensure that key groups are being reached.

- o **Refresh existing spaces** - Because a renovation of the library is still years away, we would recommend finding low or no-cost ways to refresh existing spaces, particularly the small program room in the children's area. Establish areas to "beta test" new furnishings, services, and offerings in conjunction with key community partners.

- o **Collaborate with community partners** - Identify partners who have the attention and trust of the community and reach outside the walls of the library to be a presence and convener. Survey library board members and staff for existing partnerships and natural alignment.

- o **Position library as "community center"** – while the mission states "Southington Library is Southington's community center and premier resource for information, lifelong learning, and cultural enrichment", this is not reflected in the focus group participants' perception of the library. Take the key topics that were identified as Southington's issues and convene forums on those issues. Establish the library as a key resource for any community conversations and as a presence at key community gatherings.

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staff resource deployment. Define target populations, with a focus on underserved populations, and prioritize programming to reach those who are not current users.

A quote from one focus group participant sums up the urgency to take advantage of the opportunity to reposition the library in the mind of the community:

"We have award-winning marching bands, robotics teams, football fields. All of that success should start here at the Southington Library with my three year old."

Appendix 2. **Community Speakout Wall**

The Community Speakout Wall asked four questions:

1. When I want to be with people in my community I go to . . .

2. When I describe Southington, here are the words that I use . . .

3. When I have free time, I like to . . .

4. When I have a question, I turn to . . .

Individuals used "Post-it" notes to write their responses to these questions. 197 individuals posted 253 responses. Here is a breakdown of these responses:

Go to Be With People	
Library	9
Park(s)	8
Sports	6
Church	6
YMCA	6
Downtown	4
School	4
Senior Center	3
Restaurants	3
Friend's House	2
Movies	1
Museums	1
Theatre	1
Mom	1
Different Places	1
Total Responses	**56**
Respondents	**42**

Words to describe Southington	
Great Town*	23
Lots of good Restaurants	6
Family friendly	5
Fun	4
Sports Town	4
Churches	2
Pretty Nice	1
Community Involvement	1
Negative**	11
Total Responses	**57**
Respondents	**50**
*Great Town	
Awesome/Great/Beautiful	10
Lots to do	5
Home	2
Friendly/Quiet/Comfortable	4
Well run	1
World's top place	1
**Negative	
Too much development	3
High School too big	1
Queen St.Traffic	1
Uneventful/Boring	1
All about sports (bad way)	1
Too many snobs/phonies/bullies	3
Not Diverse	1

Free time I like to	
Read	17
Play/Hang out .w/friends & family	14
Outdoor activies	10
Play Sports/Exercise	10
Misc. Shop/Clean/Nap/Babysit/etc	8
Social Media/Youtube	7
Dance	6
Music/Art Activities	6
Library Activities	6
Write Stories	2
Go to Church	1
Go to Restaurants	1
Total Responses	**88**
Respondents	**68**

Question I turn to	
Mom/Dad/Family	21
Friends	8
Google/Internet	8
Teacher	4
Bible/God	4
Misc. Town Hall, SCoC,	4
Library	3
Total Responses	**52**
Respondents	**37**

Southington Library & Museum
Focus Group & Community Forum report
June 13, 2016

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Recommendations

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A quote from one focus group participant sums up the urgency to take advantage of the opportunity to reposition the library in the mind of the community:

Appendix A.

Focus Group questions – Active Seniors

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2. In the next few years, what do you think might change in your life?
3. What's on your to-do list that you just can't seem to get off the list?
4. What do you do when you use your computer?
5. Where do you go for entertainment? Where do you go when you want to learn something new? Why those places?
6. Tell me about the first time you were in a public library
7. When you think of Southington's public library, what words come to mind? What words do you wish came to mind?
8. What would be the most important achievement of Southington's public library by the end of five years?

Focus Group questions – middle schoolers

1. What stores or places to eat do you really like? Why do you like them? Where do you go to hang out with your friends?
2. What are you interested in? Where do you go to learn more about your interests?
3. What kind of content do you create? Would you be willing to share what you create with others?
4. What keeps you from using the library more?
5. What would make Southington's public library the best possible library?

Focus Group questions – business community

1. What challenge were you most proud of being able to conquer in the last six months?
2. What challenges lie ahead for you?
3. If the community could provide one or two things to help your business, what would that be?
4. If the library were to offer any of these services, what barriers would it have to overcome for you to use the services?

Focus Group questions – parents of preschoolers

1. What brought you to Southington and what keeps you here?
2. When you want to go somewhere with your children, what's your biggest consideration?
3. If you could dream up the perfect place you take your child, what would it be?
4. How much time do you spend reading, singing, and playing games with your children on a given day?
5. Where do you find suggestions for what to read, sing, or play?
6. What role do electronic devices play in this? Do you use them or your kids or both?
7. What would you change about the Southington public library?

Community Forum questions

1. What are the three biggest issues facing your community?

2. What are ideas to address those issues?
3. What ideas did you like best that you heard tonight?
4. What words describe your community's future library?