

MANCHESTER-BY-THE-SEA PUBLIC LIBRARY

STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2025



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Mission Statement

Manchester-by-the-Sea Public Library is inclusive: an engaging and evolving civic hub for all. Sustaining community connections and innovative opportunities, the welcoming environment is a place of discovery and enrichment for all on the continuum of learning.

Vision Statement

Flexibility and focus in the present, strengthened by the spirit of traditions past, will compel us to provide vital and essential opportunities for the future.

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Introduction:

The purpose of this plan is to guide Manchester-by-the-Sea Public Library services for the next five years (2021-2025) by developing strategic goals and objectives which best match the Library's purpose and resources with the needs and desires of the community. This plan suggests areas of focus and priorities which all committee members were mindful of in terms of the Library's Mission, the community's needs, and the town's Master Plan.

The Master Plan for Manchester-by-the-Sea, adopted in 2019, was considered. Two of the four Community Vision goals endorsed as most meaningful to library work by the Strategic Planning Committee were included in our plan:

- 1) *Balanced and diverse housing options, a strong local economy, walkable neighborhoods, a dynamic downtown, and an exceptional public school system are the foundation that we have built for our healthy community.*
- 2) *Respect for the ideas and contributions of residents, volunteers, and town employees is a fundamental principle for working together and sustaining community spirit.*

A strategic plan is necessary for eligibility to apply for any direct grants from the MA Board of Library Commissioners under federal Library Services and technology Act (LSTA). State funded grants, including much needed construction and planning grants, require that libraries produce and file a strategic plan with the MBLC for eligibility.

As importantly, a strategic plan provides direction and focus for library administration and trustees in promotion and service of the library, allowing clear community engagement and understanding for purpose and priorities of the institution. This in turn allows support of service, staffing, materials, and space to adequately fulfill the contract with the town's interest and needs from the institution.

Planning Process

This strategic plan was produced by Library Director, Sara Collins, using Better Library Design/Rebecca Miller: Rowan & Littlefield, 2016, Collaborative Library Design : From Planning to Impact/Peter Gisolfi, Chicago: American Library Association, 2018, Field Guide to Strategic Planning and Facilitation/Carter McNamara, Minneapolis: Authenticity Consulting, LLC 2007, The New Planning for Results / Sandra Nelson for the Public Library Association, Chicago : American Library Association, 2001, and the assistance of Deborah Hoadley, past MLS Strategic Planning Consultant and current director at Moultonborough Library, NH.

Ms. Hoadley led three planning meetings for the strategic committee and one SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) for the staff. A town-wide survey (306 returned) was conducted in December 2018 using both the online Survey Monkey site and a paper version. An analysis of FY19-20 patron demographics, and an analysis of circulation by subject/format over three years (FY17-19) was made by the director.

A community strategic committee was formed by identifying and contacting residents known to be active in local affairs. An invitation to join the committee was included in the library's weekly press release, its monthly electronic newsletter and through fliers posted in the library and town hall. Personal invitations were sent to individuals. Friends of the Manchester Public Library and staff members also participated.

Meetings were held in September, November 2018, and January 2019. A staff SOAR exercise was held in December 2018 and a trustee SOAR exercise meeting in January 2019. The library director, Sara Collins, prepared this plan and the trustees Richard Rogers, Dorothy Sieradzki, and David Lumsden approved this plan on September 16, 2021.



GOAL: Welcoming space

Actions:

Seek out solutions to recognize and address varied uses and spatial needs by patrons. Consideration of divisions in space, including sound absorption barriers or furniture with increased height of seating, and other industry emerging solutions for multi-use library, office, and common rooms space will occur.

Explore timed use of quiet activities and more boisterous ones, charting on an introductory level, adapting, and sustaining as recommended after unique 2020 year when library model and patrons have been so adaptive.

Train staff in customer service and positive work environment will be pursued annually through an in-house or online program so part timers are able to access these opportunities as well as full time staff.

Confer with MBLC Space consultant on plans for improving and upgrading our meeting these important use of space for current patrons, as well as emerging and future interests.

GOAL: Center of collaboration

Actions:

Contact community groups annually, with staff identifying new groups to reach out to for information and potential shared programming.

Engage schools, both public, private, and homeschoolers in communication and note in collection needs as well as service preferences.
Publicize annual cooperative ventures to assure recognition of the many community groups we work with throughout the year.
Examine educational needs of adults thoroughly, especially as this relates to furthering individual opportunities and group sharing of enhancing experiences.
Promote intergenerational programs and educational experiences for various ages.

GOAL: Availability and accessibility

Actions:

Overhaul website to embrace patrons' need for easy accessibility, with 508, ADA and WCAG consideration, as well as usability for the tech savvy and tech shy.
Create consistent learning opportunities which may include one-on-one lessons, YouTube demo links on using services such as Libby, Cheat sheets, etc.
Consider need, use and placement of 24-hour lock boxes and other modes of accessing materials and content for 24/7 library access.
Explore modes to reach the tech shy or novice with our online resources for 24/7 access.
Provide ADA restroom that meets the need of patrons of all ages.
Explore long range and current options for accessing second floor.

GOAL: Sustainable stewardship

Actions:

Examine ongoing recurrent maintenance that is not publicly funded be it building maintenance, i.e., clock, wall.
Engage in outdoor community events with other agencies, sharing our mutual appreciation of the natural resources.
Utilize the grounds to encourage preservation and appreciation of nature.
Care for new library garden as an opportunity to cooperatively work with other volunteer organizations of various ages.
Consider community walks, outdoor Story Times, gardening programs, and potential Bee program with Best Bees receiving annual staff requests.
Evaluate costs/ benefits of exterior water bubbler as pedestrian and bike friendly site.
Explore bike loaner programs at other MA libraries, with a potential partnership with Cape Ann MA in Motion, or an area bike shop, etc.
Offer bike maintenance programs.

Seek out experiences of Library Bikes (a much greener version of Bookmobiles) as a Librarian mode of materials delivery.

Delve into best practices for greener operations in the facility. Reach out to neighboring groups for insight and participation in greener model.

Expand our current *Library of Things* (outdoor games, snowshoes, bike locks, hotspots, etc.) to allow for single purchases resulting in multiple uses in the community.

GOAL: Space planning

Actions

Commit to expansion of physical space as a critical need that may be met by procuring adjacent property (ongoing)

Seek a facilities assessment to assist in space planning for expansion of library.

Apply for a LSTA planning and building grant when cycle is open on MBLC site.

Pursue visits to libraries in similar sized communities or with parallel concerns.

Promote library's vision for future with informative and promotional campaign.

Shared goals created from needs and wishes of all community meetings, staff, trustee, and public surveys:

Our library needs to be more inclusive and welcoming welcome to many types of programs, families, and individuals. The world is more connected, and we need to be less insular. Library has shown it can open the community to more views and it needs to continue in this direction for the community's future growth. The library needs acknowledgment as providing the path to grow, participate, learn, and entertain in the community, and enthusiastic promotion of its past glory, present offerings, and future possibilities need to be shared clearly and frequently within the community. Space needs to be creatively utilized and expanded as far as possible. Our model must include sustainability, both in an environmental sense and a cultural one for the community. The small footprint must not deter the library from serving all aspects, ages, and interest groups in the community. The library will flourish as it reinforces its connections with other groups and populations in town and allows intergenerational and intercultural connections in the broader world.

Both formal and informational educational opportunities must be provided, with free access, to all we serve. The library's door must remain open to all in the community and provide each person with materials and experiences of cultural impact, intellectual excellence, and community interest. We must encourage a robust thinking populous with more knowledge of its connection to the world.

Results of the First Planning Committee Meeting

Components of community vision Sept 24, 2018

- Expand upon improvements in the Children's Room with expansion of library space, including outdoor use. Extending these areas of use will inspire creativity and enjoyment, while creating visibility.
- Retain charm, hominess, and welcoming history to the building as center of town. A welcoming staff and space was one of the most cited appreciations of the current library.
- Provide easily understood hours with uniformity, 28% found hours inconsistent and perplexing. Suggestions included flags outside if open, providing 24/7 hours access with lock boxes (this was cited pre COVID19)
- Utilize garden space for programs, community space, enlist community center for larger event space. Similar to above but noted for all ages.
- Continue with Adult movie nights, Game nights after hours for teens.
- More group adult learning experiences, e.g., MOOC on line, then discussion, classes, lectures, feedback with friends and other groups. Having social and learning opportunities that recognize adult interest in educational experiences was echoed by several participants.

Results of the Second Planning Committee Meeting

Meeting the Visions October 29, 2018

1. The library will play a priority role in diversity. The library will understand who is in the community and tailor materials and resources that support raising awareness and understanding differences as well as connections to a wider world. Diversity will include socioeconomic, religious, ethnic, sexual orientation, ELL, and multigenerational, etc.

2. The library will play a priority role in building community partnerships. The library will work with the Council on Aging and other community organizations by bringing them all together to share resources during a special town event where there will be activities for all ages and encourage generations to come together. This will be the beginning of a cohesive and comprehensive resource where community members can find what is going on, or what the community organizations will provide.

3. The library will play a priority role in lifelong learning. It will give access to courses and gather information on various topics. This will help to connect people to the library and widen the library's base of users. Consideration should be given to programs, books, and ultimately the space needed for these types of programs.

4. The library will play a supporting role in convening community conversations around timely topics. Topics could include grief, art, community, opioid use, welcoming new residents,

conservation, GMOs, etc. These could take place by the fireplace, “hearthside chats” on a monthly basis and invite different voices to speak on a topic. These events will be presentation, discussion and Q&A.

5. Promotion of events: The library will work with a group of volunteers to put together articles, current events and monthly events and highlight the library’s role.

6. Opportunities for community outreach within work hours and training available for library staff to learn how to facilitate meetings and community conversations.

7. Create a contained, quiet area in the building available for town people to read, research, etc. Need to identify areas of the building that can be partitioned off from areas of conversations, background noise, etc. Be it by creating a physical partition between the fireplace room and main hall, or designation of space use by hours, etc.

8. The library will play a priority role by fostering reading groups, which engage citizens of the town in listening and speaking respectfully across differences. The library will form charter groups, seeded by carefully selected participants. Volunteers will lead this endeavor.

9. The library will play a role in creating a healthy community and create social connections. This will be accomplished through programming, discussions, events, book groups, and having open spaces to connect.

10. The library will play a partnership role by organizing activities to unite kids and seniors with the COA.

11. The library will show a balanced budget and areas of need.

12. The library will support the town in participating in tours and opportunities to educate, teach and communicate unique things about the town.

13. Library will create a space, like a café with coffee and areas for people to gather.

14. The library will play a supportive role by hosting programs for teens with the school by hosting book groups, and author reading for community groups. Speakers will address interests of local teens. Focus on local interest and stories.

15. The library will focus on older residents that may have fewer options than younger people. Working with the COA and providing joint programs aimed at older populations. Need to keep seniors engaged and focus on brain health to lessen depression and brain deterioration, like dementia.

Looking at the town’s master plan, there are four challenges that were identified: 1. Public facilities to support services 2. Housing options 3. Town center (Survey 214) 4. Recreational resources. The library needs to find ways to support or meet some of these challenges to remain relevant in the town and align with the needs in the town. (168) Committees adopted both visions 3 and 4 as most central to library’s identity and purpose.

3rd Planning Committee for Aspirations and results January 14, 2019.

Better marketing of library services and materials, museum passes, down loadable assets, etc.

Mixed media displays (e.g. travel books with travel DVDs, with magazines and program fliers and brochures)

More programming

Utilize outdoor space for more engagement

All ages want” A healthy diverse community, strong economy, walkable neighborhoods, and dynamic downtown and exceptional schools.” (Master plan #3)

And “Working together and sustaining community spirit by respecting ideas and contributions of residents, volunteers, and town employees.” (Master plan #4)

Books are still the main reason groups come to the library, but they all felt the older generation* wasn’t taking advantage of what the library offers, including using the network, online resources and the like.

*Shared by a community group largely 45-65.

Demographics and Survey assessment

Town-wide Survey and FY19 Patron Demographics Analysis (Appendix Survey Monkey and MPL Patron Demographics) The Strategic Plan survey was available in print and on Survey Monkey for the December 2018-February 2019. Paper copies were distributed at Town Hall and available in the Library. Survey Monkey was available through the Library’s website and Facebook. A total of 306 surveys were counted. A previous survey in 2012 survey included 105 responses, showing a substantial jump in engagement, and endorsement of the extended time of conducting the survey. The highest percentage of respondents by age group (36%) were 50-69 years of age. This percentage is the same as the largest group in 2012 survey but that group skewed one higher, representing 66 and older. It is interesting to note that this has dropped one age level. Currently, the over 65 group in town represents 23.8 % of the community according to the 2019 US Census. Over one third of the survey participants (112) have lived in town 20 years or more. Residents here 10-19 years came in at 79, and those 4-9 years at 74, equally robust in representation.

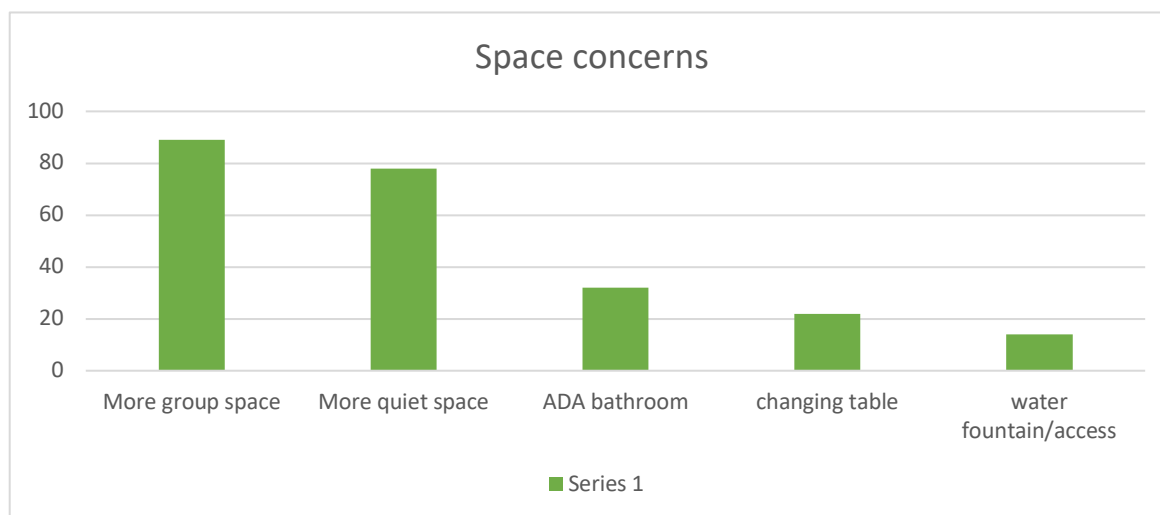
Attendance: promotion and programs:

The largest group, 97, cited the website as the source they use first and most frequently, for assessing news of the library’s event and collection. The necessary urgency then, of presentation and format that is easily understood is key. There were navigation issues noted on their website use by many (23 of the 97). The local weekly, The Cricket, was cited as the most referred to of newspapers for library information.

Most recently, pre COVID, consistent attendance of regularly scheduled library events was highest for book clubs and hands-on programs (crafts, science) 48 attendees each, with adult movie nights and book group tied at 30.

Survey respondents had checked out materials in their most recent visit, over 200 books alone, with book on cd or download at 53, 46 music cd or download, magazine 30, dvd or movie download 59, and museum passes 70. Staff were cited as being very helpful, and willing to assist with materials selection, item location, and recommendations. One hundred fourteen patrons found what they needed without assistance, 134 with some help. The variety and quality of the collection was highly regarded by 140, and considered very good by another 114, with another 27 rating this as good. Patrons would like books to remain the primary focus visually, both immediately upon entering, and in displays with a strong interest in combining these books with other related materials in the display (i.e. travel books, with travel DVDs, international cookbooks, music, etc.)

Space concerns included both lack of larger group rooms (89) for meetings and educational as well as cultural events, while an almost equal number of patrons (78) noted the difficulty in finding a place for quiet work or study. A restroom garnered 32 mentions, with a changing table getting 22, a total of 54 noting improvement needed.



Most people enter the library for materials (138) and programs, with those filling out the survey citing adult programs twice as often as Children's programs. This is an increase in both adult programs and attendance since our last Long Range Plan. Patrons strongly supported the following priorities, acknowledging the library's balancing act in funding and staffing makes prioritizing needs a necessity.

Top three priorities for staff service hours should be:

1. Print and online materials, creating and maintaining a robust collection (186 chose this a number one)
2. Programs for all ages were deemed of high interest and need (170)
3. Welcoming and accessible physical library for all, presenting and maintaining this was considered vital (125).

Top three resource priorities for our funding:

1. Collections, materials (204)
2. Programming for children, teens, adults (161)
3. Clean, safe building (100)

Community

The town of Manchester-by-the-Sea, established in 1645, is located 32 miles north of Boston on Cape Ann. This coastal community is 7.73 square miles and part of Essex County, a national heritage area. The town is bordered on the north by the towns of Essex and Hamilton, on the south by the Atlantic Ocean, on the east by the city of Gloucester, and on the west by the city of Beverly and the town of Wenham. Routes 127 and 128 are the major thoroughfares to town. Manchester is on the MBTA commuter rail. The physical landscape of Manchester is highlighted by 12.8 miles of shoreline. Singing Beach is the pride of the community and draws a large summer crowd. The picturesque New England town is surrounded by woodlands and wetlands. The Library is situated on the Town green, next to the town Hall and the Congregational Church.

Manchester-by-the-Sea Public Library History

The Manchester Free Public Library was established in 1871 with a collection of books given to the Town by the Lyceum Association, a disbanded social library. The newly established public library quickly outgrew its space in old Town Hall and Delucena L. Bingham, the first appointed Librarian, approached summer resident Thomas Jefferson Coolidge with the idea of establishing a permanent Library and Memorial Hall. Town Meeting bought the land in 1886 and T. J. Coolidge gave the building to the Town. The building was designed by Charles F. McKim and dedicated, in three parts, in October 1887. The east room was the original Library, the west room was the headquarters for the Grand Army of the Republic, and the central hall was a Civil War Memorial. In 1927 the west room and central hall became part of the Library. In 1965 the Friends of the Manchester Library were founded and raised the funds necessary to add on and furnish a Children's Room. In 1974 the Library building was added to the State Historic Properties list. The 1987 centennial year brought computerization to the Library. In 1996 a feasibility study for expanding the Library was conducted. The Library Building Committee concluded that the community was in favor of expanding the current building rather than building on a new site. Renovations to the Children's Room, with an ADA ramp to the entrance occurred in 2013 after substantial private fundraising on the part of the library trustees and Friends of the Library. In 2017, the Directors office was renovated through town capital funds and Community Preservation Committee funds for the electrical improvements. The Teen Loft was designed and renovated on the second floor of the stacks in 2019, with Capital item funding from the Town and private donations. The archives were renovated in 2020, through town capital funding.

Governance The Library is a department of the Town, governed by an elected Board of Library Trustees. The Boards' authority is derived from Chapter 78, Sections 10 and 11 of the Massachusetts General Laws. Section 10 states in part that: "the Board shall have the custody and management of the library...and of all property owned by the town relating thereto. All money raised or appropriated by the town for its support and maintenance shall be expended by the board and all money or property that the town may receive by gift or bequest shall be administered by the board..." Responsibility for Library management, collection development, and provision of library services to the public is delegated by the Board to the Library Director. The Director is appointed by and directly responsible to the Board, and is an employee of the Town of Manchester.

Staffing The Library employs 4 full time librarians, Director, Head of Adult Services, Head of Circulation Services, and a Head of Youth Services. The current work week for full time staff is 33.5 hours. The three full time librarians are members of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO. As of July 1, 2020, three of the four full time librarians hold MLS degrees. The fourth holds a Bachelor of Arts degree. Library support staff, (all part time employees working less than 19 hours per week and receiving no benefits), include three Library Assistant Clerks, a Cataloger, a Young Adult Librarian, a custodian, and several substitutes. Job descriptions for all employees are on file in the Director's office and at Town Hall.

2019-2020 Community Needs Methodology

The Library Director selected a process based on the American Library Association's guide, The New Planning for Results. Trustees, residents, community stakeholders, library staff, and a consultant worked together to prepare this plan. Various methods of data collection were used in the process. A community planning committee worked with the consultant in three community visioning workshops to identify trends and needs in the Manchester-by-the-Sea, and discussed ways that the library could either meet those needs, or be an agent/participant in community efforts to meet them. This group was comprised of representatives from the library trustees and Friends of the Library, town employees, and community members with insight that library staff may not have (for example, the Scouts, representatives of churches, business owners, medical personnel, school staff, finance committee, board of selectmen, friends of the library, etc.). These groups were led by the consultant, and not attended by library staff, so that participants could speak freely about library services and unmet needs. Finally, we conducted a community survey (informed by what we gathered in the focus groups) that we made available in the library and online. In June 2021 the Library Director and Trustees reviewed initial results to identify draft goals and actions, which were then shared with staff for feedback and further input July 2021. The Library Director then revised the document and presented a final draft to the Board of Library Trustees August 2021. The Board approved the plan at their September 16, 2021 meeting.

Appendix:

A Community snapshot, per the 2019 Census

- Population 5,434
- 24% of the population is over 65
- 50.2% male, 49.8% female.
- 98% white
- 8% speak a language other than English at home
- 2,709 or 65% of those aged 18 and older are in the labor force traveling a median of 36.9 miles.
- 74,989 is the per capita income
- 148,854 is the median household income
- 3.3 percent live below the poverty level
- 98.3% having a high school degree
- 70.8% having a bachelor's degree or higher.

From the Town report, 2019

- 299 students enrolled in pre K - 5th grades are enrolled at the Manchester Memorial School
- 1069 (for the academic year 2018-2019) are enrolled at the Manchester Essex regional Jr/High School
- Total public school population, 1,368.

Conclusions drawn from the statistics of the town's population. The residents are mainly white, English speaking, highly educated citizens, who value higher education and enjoy a high standard of living and a low poverty rate. The public has a very positive attitude toward the schools and the library, as well as general town services. The town supported the move to a regional school district, and the building of a new middle/high school in order to preserve the excellence of its public schools, with recent funding of a new elementary school. The Manchester-Essex Regional High School continually ranks as one of the top school systems in the state and the Library shares the community's support of the educational well-being and growth of this population.

Current Issues facing the Town:

Increased tax rate due to replacement of the Manchester elementary school, extensive updates to water and sewer infrastructure, Town funding of pension and retiree health insurance liabilities, increased awareness of need for more affordable housing, the need for more space/renovations at the Town Hall and Police Station, the need for an expanded Public Library, need for more playing fields, a Senior Center and a shortage of public parking. Space issues are critical in both building structures and land use. Regional climate studies indicate planning would include climate assessment regarding location of buildings, parking, access, coastal flooding, etc. as we look to remain viable and relevant in the future.