Metuchen Public Library Strategic Plan 2016-2019
Message from the Director

Dear Metuchen Residents, Friends and Neighbors,

As changes in technology, education, and the economy challenge the very idea of the traditional role of a public library, libraries are changing in new and exciting ways to adapt to the needs and expectations of their communities.

Today's libraries are places where the community connects with one another and with the world. They are cultural centers, community gathering places for discussions and learning, and yet still fulfill their traditional role as places where you'll find books – in addition to e-books, electronic resources, movies, makerspaces, cultural and recreational events, and so much more.

Metuchen Public Library has a rich history serving the “Brainy Borough” since 1870 and providing free services to its residents since 1901. We are proud of what we have accomplished and wish to remain an integral component of Metuchen’s community life while positioning the library to meet the expectations of our library users as we look to the future. This strategic plan is the work of the Library’s Board of Trustees, staff, the Friends of the Metuchen Library, community representatives, and many residents and neighbors who participated in the strategic planning survey. The plan identifies key priorities for the next few years for meeting the needs of the community, for maintaining the Library’s physical and technological infrastructure, and for ensuring the availability of needed funding. It is a road map for moving the Library in the direction that our community would like us to go.

Many of your suggestions in the survey have already been implemented; more changes will be coming in the near future. As we progress, we will continue to listen to your ideas about new library services that will benefit the community.

Please read our strategic plan. Call us or come in to talk to us. Tell us what you think. Best of all; consider working with us on how to bring the Library forward.

Thank you!

Susanna Chan
Director
Metuchen Public Library
Introduction

In 2015, the Metuchen Public Library adopted a new mission statement. Shortly thereafter the Board embarked on a process to create and develop a strategic plan that would guide future development of the Metuchen Public Library. This plan is the first in many years to develop goals and strategies to achieve its mission.

We invited both library users and non-users to participate in a paper or an online survey. We had 478 participants in the project providing us with suggestions, comments and ideas for new services. We are grateful for the time that our community spent to talk to us, to give us their thoughts on how they would like their library to evolve.

This strategic plan outlines the key steps that the Library will take to enhance and sustain the relevance and quality of services it provides to the community.
The Strategic Planning Committee

Trustees:
- Linda Koskoski – President
- Laura Stibich – Secretary

Administration:
- Susanna Chan – Director

Staff:
- Hsihsi Chung – Principal Librarian
- Mike Cadena – Principal Library Assistant

Community Stakeholders:
- Sondra Flite – President, Friends of Metuchen Library
- Kathy Glaser – Co-Director, The Library Gallery
- Mary Beth Mulligan – representative of the Metuchen Makery Committee
- Bernice Bransfield – representative of senior citizens
- Tyreen A. Reuter – representative of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society
- Angela Sielski – representative of Momma’s of Metuchen

Facilitator:
- Eileen M. Palmer, Executive Director, Libraries of Middlesex Automation Consortium
Process

The planning 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 Metuchen was conducted in late 2015 through early 2016. In total, 478 respondents participated in the survey. The committee reviewed the research and survey results and then completed an analysis of the Library’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). All of this data was used to develop a series of goals, objectives and strategies that the committee believes will strengthen the Library and build on its already impressive service delivery.
Metuchen Community Background

The Borough of Metuchen has a population of 13,756 (as of 2013) and has steadily increased its population over the last 30 years. Historically the Borough has had population peaks of about 15,000 residents. A multi-ethnic community, Metuchen has a population of 13% Asian, 7% Hispanic, 7% Black and 69% Caucasian. Known as the “Brainy Borough” Metuchen residents are well educated with 96.5% having a High School diploma and 27% having a graduate or professional degree. Metuchen enjoys a low unemployment rate on par with the state rate of 4.3%. While property values are starting to rise again, like most communities in New Jersey, falling property values between 2008 and 2013 have had an impact on municipal and library budgets.

Metuchen is a historic community with roots back to the late 1600’s. It is a walkable town with many historic homes, tree lined streets, local shops and a vibrant arts and cultural life. Surrounded by larger towns, most notably Edison, Metuchen prides itself on maintaining its small town charm and character.

Metuchen has its own public school district which includes four schools (one high school and three elementary/middle schools). Six private schools are also located within Metuchen. Combined enrollment is about 4,000 students.

Metuchen Public Library

Since 1870 Metuchen has had some type of library service, beginning with a small meeting room and growing into a tax-supported municipal library. The historic building housing the Library was dedicated in 1937 and has been renovated and enlarged several times over the last 79 years. While maintenance efforts have successfully focused on the public areas of the Library, the building and grounds are in urgent need of significant repairs and upkeep. Some interior spaces are underutilized - and unavailable to the public - due to their deteriorated state caused by lapsed maintenance.
The Library benefits from its central location and the walkable nature of the community. In Metuchen, 35% of residents are library card holders, which is slightly higher than the area average of 32%. Library services are extensive, particularly given the limited staff and budget.

During the planning process the Metuchen Public Library was compared to a cohort group of nine other libraries in New Jersey serving similar populations. Comparisons were made using annual report data for 2013 (the latest data available). Metuchen’s operating expenditures per capita were $57.56, slightly higher than the cohort group average of $50.43. Metuchen’s overall circulation per capita was 8.57, significantly higher than the average of 5.86. However, in the percentage circulation for children’s materials Metuchen ranks last of the cohort group (35.7%) whose average is 42%. It should be noted that over the last two years Metuchen has improved its circulation of children’s materials to reach 40%. Comparisons of most other measure of usage were also favorable to Metuchen (total program attendance, total visits, reference questions asked, etc.). The exceptions were children’s program attendance where Metuchen ranked 2nd to last in the group and Internet sessions where Metuchen ranked last. As with children’s circulation, a concerted effort to add computers has led to a significant increase in Internet sessions over the last two years.

**Community Survey**

Between December 21, 2015 and February 1, 2016 the Library conducted a community survey to seek input on the Library and its services. The 478 responses (3.5% of the total population) received exceeded the strategic planning committee’s expectations.

Questions were asked regarding satisfaction with library services, staff and collections. While the complete survey may be found in Appendix A, highlights of the survey responses include:

- Overall high level of satisfaction with library services among library users in Metuchen. However, responses showed the community expects more from the Library’s Children’s Department.
• Current library users’ top reason for using the Library remains reading print materials (84%).
• Other major reasons to use the Library include attending programs (46%); using the Children’s Room (41%) and using the Library’s digital services from home (40%).
• Only 2.8% of respondents indicated they never used the Library.
• Respondents identified lack of parking, limited hours and limitations on the collection as areas of concern.
• Overall respondents indicated a high level of satisfaction with Metuchen Library staff. Respondents indicated that the Children’s Room needed to be more inviting and welcoming.
• Awareness of some library services was low among respondents – for example, over 40% of respondents were unaware the Library offered programming for adults and young adults, while 32% of respondents were unaware of the Library’s digital collections.
• When asked about other (new) ways that the Library could serve the community, responses included adding more programming; serving as a community gathering place; seeking ongoing and regular input from the community; increasing cooperation between the Library and schools; creating a community WebEx-like online life-long learning program and making better use of the outside space.
**Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)**

After the strategic planning committee completed its research and reviewed the survey results a SWOT analysis was done. A SWOT analysis is an opportunity for review of the Library’s internal and external factors that will impact its ability to achieve any goals adopted in the strategic plan. Without a strong understanding of these internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) factors the Library cannot develop a realistic but aspirational strategic plan.

The Library’s major strengths are in the diversity of experience it offers through its materials, programming, art gallery, makerspace and expertise, as well as its strong core of community and municipal support (as evidenced through its volunteers, active Board and Friends group).

Weaknesses identified are primarily related to three areas:
- The building (insufficient parking, limited useful square footage, layout and past lapses in maintenance)
- Hours of operation and the quality of the collections due to budget constraints
- The range and quality of children’s services.

Opportunities felt to have the most impact for the Library included better use of outside space, expanding marketing and outreach efforts and enhancing children’s services.

While funding remains a perennial threat to public libraries the strategic planning committee believes that focusing on threats where the Library can have a measurable impact will, in the long run, help to build additional support for the Library. To that end, the most relevant threats to address in the strategic plan were determined to be the misguided perception that access to the Internet is the same thing as access to a public library and the documented concern that people are reading less. Through enhanced marketing efforts the committee believes the Library can impact both of these issues.
Mission Statement

The Metuchen Public Library seeks to inform, enrich, and empower the public; supports intellectual freedom; encourages lifelong learning; and strengthens community engagement in a welcoming environment.

We strive to provide:

- Free and equal access to information for all ages and abilities in the community
- Advocacy for the rights of library users to read, seek information, and speak freely as guaranteed by the First Amendment
- A well-balanced collection and resources that meet the interests and needs of the community
- A variety of educational, recreational, cultural, and informational activities and programs
- A place where people can connect, socialize and share their expertise
- A space for innovation, imagination and creativity
- A staff that is committed to excellence in customer service
Goals and Objectives

**Goal 1. To provide a state of the art community library experience**

- Seek funding for a needs assessment of the Library to determine specific maintenance/renovation goals and eventual capital improvements that assure the historic integrity of the building while enhancing its use as a modern library facility
  - Address much-needed capital improvements
  - Modernize, upgrade, and redesign the lower level to improve efficiency of space use and add more public spaces
  - Upgrade the heating, ventilating, air-conditioning system, and network infrastructure on the lower level
- **Regularly review and re-assess space allocation and utilization**
  - Redesign library spaces to create more public use areas such as quiet study room and meeting spaces
  - Review and expand parking alternatives
  - Provide additional public computers stations
- **Provide the public with exceptional user services experience**
  - Adhere to the Library’s mission of having a staff that is committed to excellence in customer service by regular staff training on customer services
  - Provide learning opportunities for staff to refresh knowledge and skills to effectively and efficiently serve the community
• **Provide excellent quality children’s services and programming**
  
  - Ensure the Children’s Room is welcoming and the staff has access to continuing education on children’s developmental stages and children’s literature
  - Increase age appropriate programs that meet the needs of the community
  - Tailor the Children’s Room to facilitate ease of use by children and their caregivers
Goal 2. To increase information and technology literacy through staff and patron education

- **Assure all staff are competent in technologies used in the Library**
  - Arrange staff training either in-house or through workshops, online courses and webinars on new technology
  - Provide opportunities for staff to practice the skills learned
  - Train staff to conduct information literacy and technology based programming

- **Provide patrons with diverse information literacy and technology-based programming**
  - Upgrade library technology equipment to meet the demand of the trends
  - Develop a computer hardware and software maintenance plan to keep library technology resources in a top notch condition
  - Offer additional information literacy and technology based classes and activities to the public

- **Review Wi-Fi usage and evaluate future bandwidth needs**
  - Maintain and review Wi-Fi usage statistics every month
  - Acquire more bandwidth and access points when needs arise
Goal 3. To develop and execute a comprehensive communications program to help all residents of Metuchen aware of the vast variety of services offered by the Library

- Assure all Library services are marketed and promoted to the public using a variety of techniques and tools
  - Assign staff to market library services through all available channels
  - Market library services through various social media portal, newspapers, flyers, e-newsletters, electronic folders of the school system and local TV channel
  - Update library website regularly to make sure the information is current and user friendly; and new/important events and services are highlighted
  - Increase the frequency of the Library’s services announcements
  - Post a weekly programming calendar at the front desk
  - Encourage staff to promote library programs at the front desk and during related programs
  - Improve outreach to Borough departments, religious communities and local businesses to further reach non-users
  - Identify and target underserved population to have a better understanding of their needs in terms of library services, programs and materials
• Engage and build strong partnerships with local community, educational, business, religious and other non-profit organizations
  o Hold regular meetings with educators in the school system to promote library programs and seek collaborative opportunities
  o Develop and maintain regular communications with local business and non-profit organizations to find potential partnership opportunities and supports
  o Organize events that can provide collaborative opportunities for local businesses, Chamber of Commerce, and non-profit organizations, such as, partnering with the Historical Society for workshops and programs to promote collections with historical significance
  o Increase library presence in the community by participating in town-wide events, such as, Memorial Day Parade, Junebug Festival, National Night Out and Metuchen Country Fair, etc.
Goal 4. To provide both physical and digital library collections that are well-selected, up-to-date and a reflection of our community needs

- Maintain a well-balanced, up-to-date and well-selected library collection
  - Review collection development policies every 2 years to reflect the needs of the community
  - Examine professional book review journals and best-seller lists before acquisition
  - Inspect collection regularly to remove outdated, non-circulating items and replace damaged and worn out items that are popular to the public
  - Organize collections and shelves so that materials are easily accessible, special items are highlighted, new and popular titles are within reach
  - Promote collection with display and recommendation lists
  - Expand digital collection to meet the increase in demand
  - Preserve special collections such as historical materials with digitalization
  - Acquire and process materials in a timely manner
  - Re-evaluate the cataloging map to improve better search results when using the online catalog
• Establish specific collection development policies such as foreign language materials, digital collections and historical collections
  o Maintain and evaluate special collection circulation statistics for budgeting decisions
  o Review and update collection development policies every 2 years to reflect the need for special collections
  o Collaborate with other libraries in acquisition and processing of foreign language materials
  o Assign appropriate funding to meet the demand of the community

• Institute a continuous improvement model for the children’s and young adult collections
  o Collaborate with the Metuchen school system to complement their collection
  o Build a well-balanced and up-to-date collection of award winning items, items with literary merits, as well as high demand titles such as series and graphic novel collections
  o Maintain the children’s collection with constant weeding to avoid clutter
  o Arrange the collection to make it more accessible
Goal 5. To serve as a community resource for lifelong education, civic engagement and cultural activities

• Enable the library to be used as a cultural resource
  o Provide cultural activities, programs, ESL literacy resources and special collections such as foreign language collection to the public

• Utilize outdoor space for community and cultural activities
  o Partner with local businesses and non-profit groups to organize outdoor activities such as arts/local author festival, Lion Dance etc.

• Develop programs that foster community-wide dialog on topics of interest to residents and topics of importance to the community
  o Provide comment boxes for the public to give input and program suggestions
  o Identify topics of interest by regular review of comments
  o Maintain an open door policy to the public
  o Partner with the Borough Departments, the schools and local organizations to provide programs on topics of importance to the community
• Work in partnership with local organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and Historical Society to develop community programming
  o Maintain regular communications with local organizations to identify opportunities for partnership
  o Provide assistance and support to the organizations that provide community programming such as Local History Day, Blood Drive etc.
Measurement of Success

- Annual Library Report that includes implementation of specific steps of the strategic plan with statistics showing progress in measured areas
- Community supports and advocates for the Metuchen Public Library’s need to accomplish physical improvements especially the lower level of the Library
- Positive comments from the public via emails, comment box, phone calls, letters, notes and meetings
- Positive press coverage in local newspapers
- Positive comments from social media

The Library Board and staff will evaluate the effectiveness of the plan's achievement strategies annually and make revisions as needed.
Appendix A:

Metuchen Strategic Planning Community Survey

1. General

The Metuchen Public Library is conducting a strategic planning process. Please help us to identify how we can best serve you by completing this survey.

At the end of the survey you will have an opportunity to enter a raffle to win one of 10 $25 gift certificates from the Metuchen Chamber of Commerce. Winner(s) will be contacted by the end of January.

Thank you.

1. How often do you visit the Library?
   - Daily
   - Weekly
   - Monthly
   - Occasionally
   - Never

2. If you do not visit or use the Library, why not?

   
   
   
   


3. In the last 12 months, did you (check all that apply):

☐ Borrow books or other materials
☐ Come to a program
☐ Use the Children's Room
☐ Seek information you needed about health, financial, consumer or other issues
☐ Use the Internet on library computers
☐ Use the library’s wireless access to the Internet on your own device
☐ Use a library service (such as eLibraryNJ or a database) from home
☐ Attend a meeting
☐ Visit the Gallery
☐ Use the Makerspace
☐ Use the Historical Society’s Archives
☐ Did not use the Library in the last 12 months
☐ Use Homebound Services
☐ Use Talking Book and Braille Services

Other (please specify)

☐

4. In your interactions with Library staff, how satisfied were you?

☐ Very Satisfied
☐ Satisfied
☐ Dissatisfied

Comments

☐

5. How satisfied are you with the library’s collection?

☐ Very satisfied
☐ Satisfied
☐ Dissatisfied

Comments

☐
6. How satisfied are you with the library's interlibrary loan/holds service?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Do not use this service
- Did not know this service was available

Comments
2. Programs

7. If you have attended Adult programs at the Library in the last 12 months please indicate how satisfied you were with those programs.
   - [ ] Very satisfied
   - [ ] Satisfied
   - [ ] Dissatisfied
   - [ ] Did not know the Library had programs.

   Comments

8. If you have attended Children's programs at the Library in the last 12 months please indicate how satisfied you were with those programs.
   - [ ] Very satisfied
   - [ ] Satisfied
   - [ ] Dissatisfied
   - [ ] Did not know the Library had programs.

   Comments

9. If you have attended Young Adult programs at the Library in the last 12 months please indicate how satisfied you were with those programs.
   - [ ] Very satisfied
   - [ ] Satisfied
   - [ ] Dissatisfied
   - [ ] Did not know the Library had programs.

   Comments
10. What types of programs for Adults would you be interested in attending at the Library? Choose all that apply.

☐ Author book discussions/signings
☐ Computer classes
☐ Crafts (jewelry, sewing, etc.)
☐ Current events/politics
☐ Documentary film/discussions
☐ Financial topics
☐ Gardening
☐ Health and wellness topics
☐ History lectures
☐ Job hunting, career building
☐ Movies
☐ Music events
☐ Writing or journaling classes
☐ New Jersey interests
☐ Summer Reading Club
☐ Cultural Events
☐ Games
☐ Book Clubs
☐ Gallery Events
☐ Makerspace programs

Other (please specify)
11. What types of programs for Children would you or your children be interested in attending at the Library?

☐ Storytime (rhymes, stories, music, etc.)

☐ Crafts

☐ Building (legos, blocks, etc.)

☐ Playtime

☐ Puzzle or game challenges

☐ Movies

☐ How-to (gardening, cooking, etc.)

☐ History

☐ Technology or computer

☐ Writing or book discussion

☐ Summer Reading

☐ Makerspaces

Other (please specify)
12. What types of programs for Young Adults would you be interested in attending at the Library?

☐ Summer Reading
☐ Crafts
☐ College Prep
☐ Book Discussions
☐ Writing Workshops
☐ Movies
☐ How-to (gardening, cooking, etc.)
☐ History
☐ Technology or computer
☐ Social Events
☐ Author visits
☐ Art Workshops
☐ Makerspaces

Other (please specify)


13. What are the best times for you to attend Library programs?

☐ Weekday mornings
☐ Weekday afternoons
☐ Weekday evenings
☐ Saturday
☐ Sunday

14. Have you attended programs at other libraries that you wish were offered at Metuchen Public Library? If so please let us know what the programs were about.


15. What types of library materials do you borrow or download from the library?

☐ Nonfiction books
☐ Fiction books
☐ Children's books
☐ Audiobooks
☐ Movies or TV shows
☐ Music
☐ Magazines
☐ Museum Passes
☐ Young Adult Materials
☐ Foreign Language Materials

Other (please specify)

16. If you read materials in languages other than English, does the Library's collection meet your needs?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If no, please indicate what other languages you wish the Library had.

17. If you have used the Library's downloadable materials (audiobook, book, video, magazine, or music services) how satisfied are you with them?

☐ Very Satisfied
☐ Satisfied
☐ Dissatisfied
☐ Did not know the library offered this service
18. What could the Library do to improve its downloadable materials services?

19. Are you aware that the Library provides residents with no fee access to a number of information databases that require paid subscriptions in areas such as careers and education, business, health care, science, history, literature, newspapers and consumer news?

☐ Yes I am aware and I have used this service
☐ No I was not aware of this service
☐ Yes I am aware of the service but have not used it.

20. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel safe in the Library building</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Library is welcoming</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Library building meets the community’s needs</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can find a quiet place to study when I am at the Library</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can find a place to park when I come to the Library</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The one thing I would change about the Library building is:

21. Are there other ways you would like to see the Library’s space used?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If Yes, please explain

☐
4. Other Services

22. Do you currently have regular access to a computer and the Internet for your personal use somewhere other than the Library?

☐ Yes
☐ No

23. If you use the Internet at the Library please tell us why.

☐ No access at home
☐ Quieter place to work
☐ Working with others on projects
☐ Access to expertise from Library staff

Other (please specify)

24. What kind of digital devices are used in your home?

☐ Smart Phone
☐ Tablet / e-reader
☐ Gaming Systems
☐ Personal Computer

Other (please specify)

25. What do you value the most about the Library?
26. In what new ways would you like to see the Library serve our community?

27. Do you have any expertise or interest that you would like to offer to share with our community through the Library?
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

   If yes, please tell us about your expertise and include your email so we can follow up with you -- or send an email with a description of your expertise/interest to metuchenlibrary@gmail.com

28. In the last year how have you received information about library services? Choose all that apply.
   ○ Friends of the Metuchen Library
   ○ Library Calendar
   ○ Facebook
   ○ Friend or neighbor
   ○ Newspaper
   ○ Newsletter
   ○ Library Website
   ○ Program Flyers

   Other (please specify)
29. How often do you visit the Library's website?
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Occasionally
- Never

30. Are you a resident of Metuchen?
- Yes
- No

31. If you are a resident of Metuchen, do you also use other area libraries?
- Yes
- No
- If Yes, what libraries do you use?

32. What is the main reason you use other libraries?
- Location
- Hours
- Collection
- Programming
- Other (please specify)
33. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your expectations for the Library (now or in the future)?
6. Demographics

Please tell us something about yourself.

34. How old are you?
   - Under 10
   - 11-19
   - 20-29
   - 30-39
   - 40-49
   - 50-59
   - 60-69
   - 70-79
   - 80+

35. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male

36. Did you fill out the survey on paper rather than online?
   - Yes
   - No

37. Thank you for filling out our survey. If you would like to be entered into our raffle to win a $25 gift certificate from the Metuchen Chamber of Commerce please provide an email address or phone number so that we may contact you if you win.