



JOHN G. McCULLOUGH FREE LIBRARY

Strategic Plan 2023 - 2026



MISSION:

The John G. McCullough Library is an essential community center: a comfortable and welcoming place where people of all ages can satisfy their curiosity, stimulate their imaginations, become better informed, and connect to the online world. Our library cultivates a stable, vital, and dynamic community by facilitating lifelong learning and literacy at all levels.

INTRODUCTION

As it enters its second century of service, the John G. McCullough Free Library endures as an excellent example of how library services and facilities adapt and grow to meet a community's needs, interests, and aspirations. This plan outlines goals based on community input and which build on the organization's strengths for continued improvement.

LOCATION AND HISTORY

North Bennington is located in the southwestern corner of Vermont, roughly six miles from both Shaftsbury and downtown Bennington. The library itself is centrally located in North Bennington, sharing the perimeter of Lincoln Square with thriving small businesses and charming, historic buildings. Bennington College is within walking distance to the library. Once a manufacturing center, the area has gradually shifted to an economy based on tourism, health care, education, and cultural events and attractions. More recently, remote workers have moved here to take advantage of the area's natural beauty and ample opportunities for outdoor recreation while working from home.

In 1878, the North Bennington Ladies Library Association was established, charging a \$1 annual membership fee. (about \$30 in 2023). By the late 1890s, the Library Association received a modest amount from the village coffers. In 1900, it was decided that the association would no longer charge dues, but rather become the North Bennington Free Library. The library was sustained by donations and local taxpayers, but the collection (about 5,000 items) was kept in various members' homes until the current building opened its doors in August 1921 and was incorporated as the John G. McCullough Free Library.

The building's handsome, two-story brick exterior has not changed much over the past century, but the collection and interior spaces have adapted to meet the community's priorities and interests. When the building opened, the second floor was a meeting and performance space for adults. The youth collection was very small, occupying the area where audiobooks on CD and DVDs for adults are now kept. Today, nearly all of the second floor is devoted to youth services. The recent conversion of a large closet on the second floor into the Laura Nowak Memorial Meeting Room is, in a sense, a return to the building's original purpose: a place for meetings and quiet work.

THE LIBRARY TODAY

The McCullough Library's collection now contains more than 20,000 items and serves nearly 4,000 active members living in North Bennington, Shaftsbury, Bennington, and other nearby communities. In the early 2000s, the card catalog was digitized. In 2018, the McCullough Library joined Catamount Library Network (CLN), a lending consortium of 22 Vermont libraries. Consortium membership has dramatically improved interlibrary loan, granting members access to over 500,000 items, and has made browsing the catalog from home or a mobile device easier and more enjoyable. Since then, use of the collection has substantially increased, both as a lender to McCullough Library members and to other network libraries. Use of the McCullough Library's digital collections, such as Libby for ebooks and digital audiobooks and Kanopy for video streaming increased dramatically through the COVID-19 pandemic and is still experiencing steady growth.

Free community events have become a central component of the McCullough Library's service. Despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, participation in library-hosted events has remained relatively strong. The library's Summer Reading Program for young people, a series of entertaining and educational events and challenges which incentivize reading while school is not in session, is particularly popular. For adults, the annual Shirley Jackson Day Celebration, Vermont Humanities Council events, and crafting opportunities are especially well attended.

In addition to the creation of the Laura Nowak Memorial Meeting Room, the library recently completed critical accessibility, systems, fire safety, and air quality upgrades. These improvements included ADA-accessible restrooms on both floors, a new water fountain with tap for water bottles on the second floor, a complete electrical rewiring, a hardwired fire alarm system, a sprinkler system in the basement, and the installation of a complete HVAC system, which includes a heat pump. Repairs and a fresh coat of paint for the library's iconic portico and a new, accessible back door are currently underway. These necessary improvements and unavoidable construction delays extended the length of time the building was closed to the public during the COVID-19 pandemic.

PRIORITIES AND NEEDS

The John G. McCullough Free Library has enjoyed a wave of community support in recent years, but needs exist that must be addressed to ensure it has the resources to meet the goals outlined in this strategic plan. A key priority is ensuring a sustainable long-term funding structure; without a solid financial base, it will become increasingly difficult to maintain the building, services, and collections. All other goals and priorities, especially those related to programming, collections, and building improvements, depend on this.

A sustainable staffing structure is essential to the success of this and future plans. Maintaining a professional, knowledgeable, efficient, and responsive staff is necessary to ensure that the library can realize its goals and continue to thrive. The McCullough Library's proximity to Bennington College and a recent wave of new neighbors from suburban and urban areas as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have an influence on the public's expectation for new library events, services, and areas of expertise. In the wake of the pandemic, library staff are connecting and reconnecting neighbors with one another at community events, and with resources to help them navigate new questions, ideas, and challenges.

Creating and maintaining a safe, accessible, environmentally sustainable, and attractive facility is necessary and directly related to the efficacy with which the library can serve the community. According to current Census data, 20% of Bennington residents under age 65 are persons with a disability, and 23% of residents are over age 65. (Citation: U. S. Census Bureau. QuickFacts Bennington town, Bennington County, Vermont; United States. [census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/benningtontownbenningtoncountyvermont,US/PST045222](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/benningtontownbenningtoncountyvermont,US/PST045222). Accessed 2 June, 2023). These demographics are a mandate for a fully accessible building.

This strategic plan is designed to meet the current and future needs of our community, and will set the library's course for the next three years. It will serve as a guide for future development and help to establish priorities for the allocation of resources and development of services. It recognizes the necessity for advocacy within our community for a sustainable funding structure and establishes a direction and plan for achieving the library's mission and the community's goals for the library.

WHERE WE'VE BEEN:

THE 2017- 2022 STRATEGIC PLAN

Connect

With clear, consistent communication about events, initiatives, and changes.

Yearly Updates for donors.

Monthly e-newsletters.

Look for a repaired or new outdoor sign to include a permanent letterbox for events.

The library's website will be updated to be more mobile friendly.

Continued social media presence to include Facebook and Instagram

Anticipate an increased library presence at Select Board and Town Meetings.

Monthly staff meetings to include Library Science and Customer Service training

Friends of the Library meetings will be held on a monthly basis.

Key:
Complete
In Process
Not Complete

Discover

A convenient and welcoming space for all.

Launch and complete an accessibility project to include an elevator, a family restroom, and uniform, large print signage. (Phase I of II complete)

Develop a quiet study room in the closet space at the top of the stairs.

The Children's Room will be updated. (new circulation desk in 2022, complete updates by end of 2024.)

New, sturdy, comfortable chairs for children and adults will be installed.

A book drop and picnic table will be installed outside.

The feasibility of creating parking spaces on the library's side lawn will be investigated (FOUND NOT FEASIBLE)

The feasibility of increasing the library's hours of operation to include at least two mornings per week will be investigated.

Create

Learn and grow with us as we learn and grow with you!

Look for at least one "big" event for adults and one for children every month.

We'll host at least two technology and information literacy skills events every year.

We'll maintain up-to-date computers, fast Internet connection, and will create a laptop lending program.

We'll develop a Tool Lending Library

The number of museum, cultural institution and recreation area passes will increase.

The library will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2021, with a series of local history events (COVID-19 disrupted this, focus shifted to building reopening celebration in 2022.)

We'll develop a digital archive to help preserve and share items of local significance. (Feasibility not established. may be outside of Library's mission and capacity.)

2022 COMMUNITY SURVEY

A Community Survey was launched on August 1st, 2022, and closed on November 1st, 2022.

The survey generated seventy responses, some of which represented the opinions of a household rather than an individual.

Survey questions:

- What is great about the McCullough Free Library?
- What is not-so-great about the McCullough Free Library?
- What would encourage you to visit the library more often?
- How has your relationship with books, technology, and other resources changed?
- What does the McCullough Library of the future look like to you?

A note about timing: This survey was released when a late August building reopening seemed possible. Unfortunately, unavoidable construction delays stymied these plans. It is likely that survey responses would have been less focused on the short-term goal of accessing the building and a return to regular service if the project had been completed sooner.

Library staff members met on November 4th, 2022 to review responses, determine organizational strengths, and identify opportunities to meet community needs and aspirations. These findings were shared with the Library's Trustees on November 14th to set reasonable goals to foster improvement.

Organizational Strengths:

- Community members appreciate the efforts of library staff, and their approach to service, especially through the pandemic.
- Nearly all who responded to the survey indicated that they appreciate the changes brought about in recent years: the re-launch of regular community events, increased access to materials through interlibrary loan and digital collections, and work to preserve and improve the library building.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- Responders indicated that they need the library to increase its hours of operation.
- Adults have indicated that they would like a greater number and higher quality of library events to choose from.
- Technology Assistance and Information Literacy Instruction opportunities for seniors are needed.
- A number of responders indicated that spaces in and around the library building could be put to better use. Responders indicated that parking remains a problem, and that there aren't enough places to sit and read inside the building.

WHERE WE'RE GOING: 2023- 2026 GOALS

- ◆ Return to pre-pandemic program attendance for all ages by the end of 2023. An emphasis on quality, partnerships, and relevant interests over quantity will guide event planning.
- ◆ Expand the library's digital collections to include LinkedIn Learning (technology and job skills tutorials) and Zinio (a collection of 3,000+ popular magazines) by the end of 2024.
- ◆ Complete repairs to and source new furnishings for what is now the Bonnie Dundas Youth Room by the end of 2024.
- ◆ Establish a Building Reserve Fund by the end of 2023. Building preservation work to include window casings, repairs to the marble steps and brickwork on the front porch, and floor refinishing by the end of 2025. Maintenance to include fresh paint in the lobby and new carpeting completed by the end of 2023.
- ◆ Obtain a Sustainable Libraries Initiative certification by the end of 2025. The Sustainable Libraries Initiative is an American Library Association sponsored certification process. It is a tested, structured path forward to increase the library's commitment to environmental stewardship, economic feasibility, and social equity.
- ◆ Complete an accessible rear entry and elevator installation project by the end of 2026.

VISION: *Connect* with a variety of resources, expert assistance, and your neighbors through continuing communication about collections, services, events, and initiatives.
Discover a safe and welcoming space for all.
Create a stronger, informed, and resilient community.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

Take advantage of all the McCullough Library offers!

Books, DVDs, and audiobooks, interlibrary loan, reader's advisory and reference services, museum passes, the new Tool Library, ebooks and digital audiobooks, free video streaming, and so much more! Reserve the Laura Nowak Memorial Meeting Room, snip sage from the herb garden for your supper, use the Wi-Fi.

Attend Library events-- and bring a friend!

Join your friends and neighbors for free events. From Vermont Humanities Council Speakers Bureau lectures to Saturday Morning Storytime, there's something for everyone.

Volunteer

The Friends of the Library welcome your help with fundraising for special projects and their annual Spring and Fall cleanup events. Volunteer gardeners are also welcome.

Advocate

Learn more about all the library offers and share what you've learned with your neighbors. Let your elected officials know how much you value and support the library. Vote to support the library at Town Meeting.

Donate

The McCullough Library thrives with your support. Including the McCullough Library in your estate plans will help ensure its future.

Library Trustees:

Judy Crane: Chair
Mary Rogers: Treasurer
Stephanie Eames: Secretary
Timmy Bullock
Robert Cane
Judy Cohen
Cathy Daughton
Linda Foulsham
Cindy Mangsen
Charlie Rossiter

Library Staff:

Jennie Rozycki: Library Director
Cassidy Kokasko: Assistant Director
Gizelle Guyette: Youth Services Librarian
Susan Alan Craig: Cataloger
Berta Winiker: Aide
Alice Hansmann: Aide

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