

## SOUTH WINDSOR PUBLIC LIBRARY

### STRATEGIC PLAN 2019

#### NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The Board of Directors of the South Windsor Public Library began the process of crafting a Strategic Plan for the library during the 2017 — 18 fiscal year. In addition to using the State Library's self-assessment tool, Best Practices, they studied the approach to library services presented in *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries* published by the Aspen Institute and took advantage of opportunities to learn how other libraries had written new action plans for future development. In the spring of 2018, the Board developed a statement of their intentions and scheduled interviews with three possible consultants to help with the project. Before a consultant was hired, the Board became aware of the opportunity to apply for a \$5,000 planning grant under the Federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) administered by the CT State Library. The grant was awarded in November of 2018, and its terms established a project calendar of January —June 2019.

The firm Maxine Bleiweis & Associates, LLC (Maxine Bleiweis, Principal and Erica Byrne, Senior Associate) was chosen to consult on the planning process. During initial discussions between the Board and the consultants, it was agreed that the "Aspen Report" would be used as a guiding document. The consultants would assist the Library Board and staff in researching South Windsor's characteristics as a community and aspirations for the future and the ways the library can participate in the achievement of those goals.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Ms Bleiweis and Ms Byrne facilitated four focus groups (37 people representing adults active in community affairs, parents of young children, businesspeople, and middle school students) and conducted hour-long telephone interviews with eight town leaders representing government, education, civic, and business sectors. An Advisory Group of approximately twenty townspeople met to hear about the planning efforts and to contribute their own assessment of the community and its library. The Library Board participated in overall planning meetings and helped invite individuals to the various citizen groups, and also participated in drafting goals and objectives as members of a Work Group with six members of the library staff. Library staff members not part of the smaller Work Group contributed to the process through a half-day introductory session (the "Staff Focus Group") and individual interviews, as well as a designated staff meeting to chart the plan's progress.

No general citizen surveys were included in the project because a large citizen satisfaction survey had been conducted for the Town Council within a year of the Library undertaking. Survey results indicated overall satisfaction with the Library. When asked about possible new services, those related to school/library partnerships (including literacy, non-curricular activities that support learning and engagement, and training for jobs and careers) ranked high; as did activities related to building community (serving as a resource for clubs and organizations and improving communications about local events). Since the South Windsor Public Library had hosted a session of the "Listening Tour" conducted by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving in February 2019---essentially a focus group meant to elicit participant comments on their community's "way of life"--- our consultants were able to

learn from that, as well. Concerns raised at this gathering were also reflected in the Library's focus groups and interviews:

- Shifts in "character" of town from rural to industrial
- Shifts in demographics (race/ethnicity & age)
- Long-time (generational) residents v. newcomers
- Pride in response to these changes — groups set up to welcome and promote acceptance.
- Lack of a natural town center.
- Parents of young children described their ideal spaces — ability to bring children of different ages, have own enrichment opportunities.
- 7th graders expressed a desire for communal space for study/collaboration and quiet space away from home

Of particular importance was the community vision crafted by the Advisory Council following exercises that explored the group's aspirations for our community, challenges to be faced in reaching them, and changes that might lead to success in attaining them. Their view of an "ideal" South Windsor included:

- All feel welcome, accepted, and enlightened
- We support one another
- We are vibrant and support the dreams of all
- We light the way toward the future without losing sight of the past
- We are growing, not declining

To overcome the challenges of apathy, prejudices, misconceptions, and lack of resources (money, personnel, and time), they offered the following hopes:

- We need to create a hometown, energized feeling
- We need to create opportunities for cultural exchange
- We need to reach out to the youth, have more volunteers, and build new leadership
- We need to be inclusive and hear all opinions
- We need to identify a collective goal and stay focused on reaching it

The consultants also used demographic data available through State agencies, the 2018 CERC Town Profile, and the U.S. Census Bureau to complete their description of South Windsor as a community.

## MISSION

The Library's Strategic Planning Work Group, comprised of Library Board Members and staff, met with our consultants four times to discuss how the Library could best play a role in the development of the South Windsor community as a desirable place to live. A new Library Mission Statement was crafted:

***The mission of the South Windsor Public Library is to create welcoming experiences for people of all ages in our diverse region that will foster opportunities for community connections, promote individual growth, and provide access to resources that spark creativity.***

## SERVICE PRIORITIES

Additional discussion led to categorizing Library goals and objectives for the next three to five years under four Service Priorities, each of which will allow the Library grow as a vital resource that will

contribute to community pride and engagement. We commit to providing a flexible physical space that is adaptable to future uses and in keeping with changing services, programs, interests and needs of Library users and the community. Our Service Priorities relate to the aspirations expressed by those who contributed to our discussions:

**Be an Informed Citizen** regarding local, national, and world affairs. Residents will have the information they need to support and promote democracy, to fulfill their civic responsibilities at the local, state, and, national levels, and to fully participate in community decision-making.

- **Community members will find the information they need regarding local affairs.**
- **Community members will find the information they need regarding national and world affairs.**

**Connect to community.** Community engagement. The library will offer programs, services, and collections that reflect community needs and interests, feature community voices, and create meaningful experiences, including those that promote appreciation and understanding of their personal heritage and the heritage of others in the community. The library will be a place where everyone can feel welcomed and supported.

- **The community will understand South Windsor's past and reflect on its future.**

**Explore 21st Century Work Opportunities.** Job and career training and exploration. Teens and adults at all stages of their careers will be able to access the training and resources that they need to identify career opportunities that suit their individual strengths and interests.

- **South Windsor residents, from teen to adult, will have access to up-to-date resources that will develop their career competencies at all stages of their work life.**

**Support Young Learners and Their Families.** Youth and their families will have the resources they need for success and lifelong learning.

- **Children from birth to grade 12 and their families will have access to programs and services that promote literacy skills and encourage community engagement.**
- **Young learners and their families will have a space that provides opportunities for hands-on, multi-age, and intergenerational learning and play.**

One additional focus constitutes an **Internal Service Priority**:

**Planning for organizational future.** Library staff will intentionally prepare for future personnel changes due to retirements and changes in service delivery. This process will allow for the transfer of institutional knowledge and take into consideration potential shifts in programming and community needs.

- **Library Administration will develop a succession plan that will preserve the culture of the organization while providing a foundation for future library development.**

## IMPLEMENTATION

Library staff members have continued the planning process by developing lists of Objectives and Activities for each of the Goals listed in bold above, along with measurements for success in completing

them. Upon adoption by the Library Board, the Library's resources, services, programs, and other activities will be considered in terms of how they support the Plan.

Members of the public who participated in Focus Groups, interviews, and the Advisory Council will be invited for a presentation of the Strategic plan at a gathering in the fall of 2019 and will receive updates on our progress in successive years. The Town Council will be offered a presentation of the Plan at a televised meeting. The plan will be made available to the public on the Library website and print copies will be available at the Library. The Library Director's monthly reports to the Library Board will be adapted to track progress on the Plan.

The Strategic Plan will be evaluated by the Library Board in the fall of 2021, and will determine their method of updating it or extending it at that time.

### **South Windsor Public Library**

#### **Members of the Library Board of Directors**

##### **Strategic Planning Committee**

Elizabeth Asplund, Chair

Catherine Gallagher

Marcia Andrus

Kathleen-Mary Sharos

Katherine Chiappetta

Carole Stroud

Janice Snyder, Town Council Liaison

Mary Etter, Library Director

##### **Consultants**

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Supported by a Grant awarded by the Connecticut State Library under the Library Services and  
Technology Act

August 2019