

**Jacob Edwards Library
Southbridge, MA
Long Range Plan FY2023-FY2028**

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Submitted to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners by
Margaret Morrissey, Library Director,
Robin Weber, Chairperson, and
The Jacob Edwards Library Board of Trustees

Acknowledgment:

Special thanks to colleagues throughout the state for sharing their plans.



Approved by the Board of Trustees at the June 27, 2023 meeting.

Board of Trustees	Position		Jacob Edwards Library Staff	Position
Robin Weber*	Chair		Margaret Morrissey	Director
James Dyer	Vice Chair		Jessi McCarthy	Adult Services Librarian
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			Jeanne Dupuis	Library Aide
			Yerliain Miranda Colon	Library Page
			Raleigh Zacek	Library Page

*Bank appointed

^Non-Board member

Library Mission Statement

The Jacob Edwards Library enjoys a rich legacy of excellent service and is committed to the promotion of reading, education, literacy, culture, and lifelong learning for persons of all ages in our community.

Vision Statement

Jacob Edwards Library will be the community hub, the place for any and all of our community's residents to gather, learn and discover.

Library Tagline

The library is the community place to be with something for everyone.

Executive Summary

COVID-19 has been life-altering for libraries and library services. As a consequence of the pandemic, the library closed on March 16, 2020, following the Governor's recommendation across the state. For weeks, staff were home in an effort to "slow the spread" but it became apparent that COVID-19 was going to be here for a longer unspecified period,

- Staff furlough started the first week of April 2020. Three staff worked to provide curbside service and for a period, the collection was not browsable.
- Full-time staff had a staggered return in June 2020. Part-time staff returned and full service resumed, with the addition of curbside on the day after Labor Day 2020.

Staff had to develop alternate skill sets to embrace the changed service model. The flexibility of staff during this period was crucial to the success of this new environment.

A "positive" side to COVID-19 was the introduction of curbside delivery right to the patron's vehicle. Introduced during a time of need and recognized as an ongoing service option, the service continues to be available to patrons.

Programs were recorded live on Facebook and broadcast to patrons during the library closure. The library has continued to broadcast to the community, as it is recognized that some patrons would like to participate but are unable to attend in person. JEL forged a strong connection with Southbridge Community TV which records and produces the adult programs to a professional standard and uploads them to YouTube channel where they are available.

Other strong relationships that we have forged allow the Library to host the tax preparation assistance program now staffed by QCC (Quinsigamond Community College) students and faculty, and the fuel assistance program (LIHEAP). The CHNA5 (Community Health Network Area 5) has connected the library to the human and social service agencies in the region.

The Board of Trustees have funded technology upgrades to both the Pioppi and Reading rooms and have provided seed money for a chess park on Main Street in the Southeast section of the property. The Board continues to fund half of the annual materials budget. Future developments include the move to install broadband (fiber optic) network connectivity.

Challenges to library collections and programs have increased exponentially, throughout the nation. Library staff are experiencing criticisms, challenges and are under scrutiny. "Efforts to ban books have persisted in American history, but those efforts are reaching unprecedented

heights.”¹ The trade periodical Publisher’s Weekly reports that ALA has recorded challenges of 2,571 unique titles, “a stunning 38% increase from the 1,858 unique titles targeted for censorship in 2021.”² There were 377 challenges in 2019. The collection development policy and procedures were amended to reflect the new library environment.

Southbridge Community History & People

Southbridge was established as a poll parish in 1801 and incorporated as a town in 1816. It emerged as a breakaway from the towns of Sturbridge, Charlton, and Dudley. Southbridge’s development was based initially on the cotton and woolen mills and later on the optical, cutlery, and hand tools industries. The American Optical Company was a world leader in optical innovation and later innovated the fiber optic industry. Dexter-Russell (Russell Harrington) has been continuously operating in the town for more than 200 hundred years. Other large employers include the UMass Memorial at Harrington Hospital and the healthcare industry; the fiber optics industry including United Lens; and, Hyde Tools which has manufactured hand tools for over 140 years, as well. There are several other manufacturing companies, and social and public service agencies. In line with national trends, brick and mortar small businesses have moved out of Southbridge.

Southbridge is located in the south-central portion of the Commonwealth, almost equidistant from the cities of Worcester, Springfield, Providence, and Hartford. The town is a mix of suburban, rural, and urban sections and encompasses approximately 21 square miles. Public bus service is available to Worcester and access to Webster is the only intertown public transportation option.

With an injection of grant funding, parks and trails are being renovated to improve the recreational options in the town. Two historic buildings have been converted to housing – a former school to exclusively senior housing (Residences at Wells School) and part of the American Optical campus to affordable housing (Southbridge Mills). A new fire station is planned for 2024.

Southbridge has a Town Manager/Town Council form of government. The Town Manager reports to a nine-member Town Council and its subcommittees. Southbridge is one of fourteen

¹ "Surge in Book Challenges Press Kit ", American Library Association, November 22, 2021.

<http://www.ala.org/news/mediapresscenter/presskits/surge-book-challenges-press-kit>

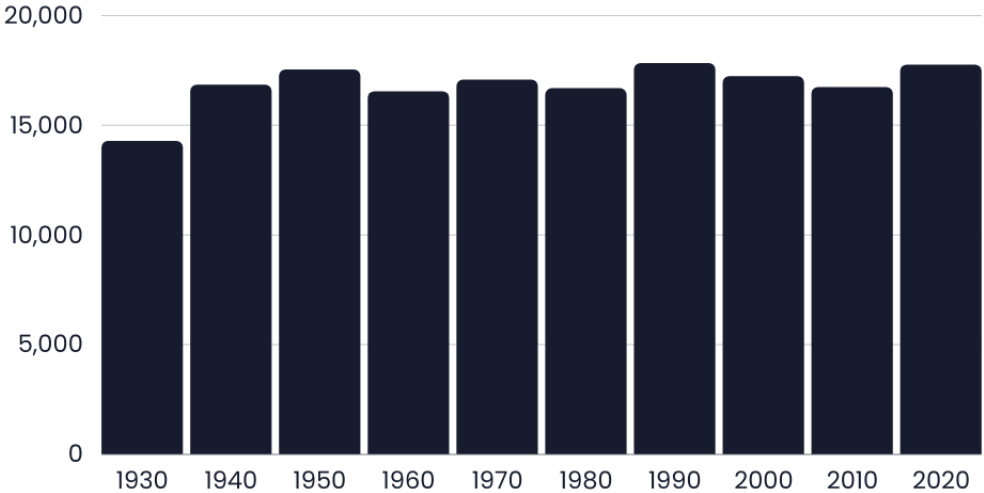
² Albanese, Andrew. “ALA Reports Shocking Increase in Attempted Book Bans in 2022.” Publishers Weekly, 23 Mar. 2023,

www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/libraries/article/91823-ala-reports-shocking-increase-in-book-challenges-in-2022.html.

Massachusetts municipalities that have applied for, and been granted, city forms of government but wish to retain "The town of" in their official names.

Southbridge Population by Decade

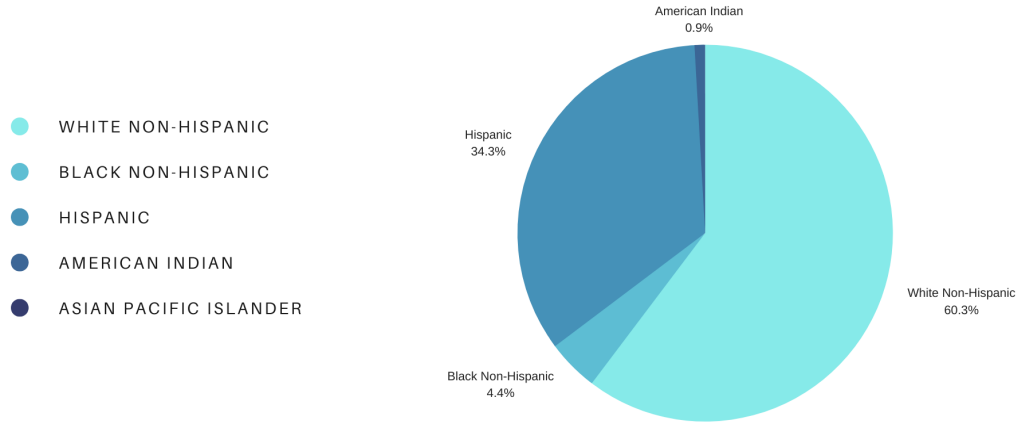
US Census Data



1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
14,264	16,825	17,519	16,523	17,057	16,665	17,816	17,214	16,719	17,740

SOUTHBRIDGE POPULATION BY RACE

2020 Census Data



SOUTHBRIDGE POPULATION BY RACE AND GENDER

	2010	2010 PERCENTAGE	2020	2020 PERCENTAGE
Male	8,055	48.2%	8,497	47.9%
Female	8,656	51.8%	9,243	52.1%
White Non-Hispanic	11,660	69.8%	10,626	59.9%
Black Non-Hispanic	242	1.4%	781	4.4%
Hispanic	4,452	26.6%	6,049	34.1%
American Indian	58	0.3%	160	0.9%
Asian Pacific Islander	299	1.8%	0	0.0%

The Town of Southbridge has a rich history of multiculturalism and has many different ethnic and cultural groups that make up the fabric of the town. Business ownership in the community is starting to reflect this diversity.

From Pew Research, “On the surface, the total count in the 2020 census was a success, but data for subgroups and states is flawed by undercounts, overcounts and incorrect counts.” Additionally, “There was a record undercount of Hispanics. The census count of more than 62 million Hispanics still missed one-in-twenty of them. That is more than 3 million Hispanics, or about four times the number missed in 2010. The historic pattern of high undercount rates also continued in 2020 for the Black population, American Indians and Alaska Natives on reservations, and people who identified as ‘Some other race...’ Massachusetts was 2.2% overcounted.”³

The 2020 US Census population was recorded as 17,740. Southbridge returned a reported increase of 1,597 people with Hispanic origins, amounting to 34.1% of the total population. Conversely, the white population has decreased by 1,034 in the same 10 year period. A reported increase in the population has taken place. One reason for this may be due to the relatively more reasonable rental rates and number of apartments available in Southbridge.

The Town of Southbridge, Massachusetts has a poverty rate of 20.7%, almost 10% greater than the national average, 59% of which are low- and moderate-income earners, or <80% the state nonmetropolitan median household income.”⁴

It is important to note that the most significant change can be seen in the town’s youth population. While the total Hispanic population in Southbridge is 26.6%, for residents age 9 and under, the Hispanic population percentage jumps to 42.6%.

Southbridge faces economic and social challenges. It is identified as the 9th poorest community in the state. In 2021, per capita income is \$29,962 and median income is \$50,414, establishing

³ Cohn, D’Vera and Jeffrey S. Passel. “Key Facts about the Quality of the 2020 Census.” Pew Research Center, 8 June 2022, www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/06/08/key-facts-about-the-quality-of-the-2020-census/#:~:text=94%2D171%20census%20counts%20for,undercounts%2C%20overcounts%20and%20incorrect%20counts.

⁴ “QuickFacts: Southbridge Town city, Massachusetts; United States.” U.S. Census Bureau, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/southbridgetowncitymassachusetts.US/PST045219> .

20.2% of the population as living below the poverty line. By comparison, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts median income is \$89,026.⁵

Southbridge's population is 59% low- and moderate-income (LMI), with Black and Hispanic residents over-represented in our highest LMI neighborhoods, throughout and adjacent to the Downtown.

Block Group 3, Census Tract 7572, where the Library is located, has a minority population of 53.3%, a median household income of \$31,438 (37.3% of the MA MHHI), and 10.1% of the households have language isolation. In 2020 this block group had a population of 860 in 365 households. The Library is well-positioned geographically (on the corner of Main and Foster streets), and is attempting to meet the community needs with an expanding service model.⁶

On a positive note, the 2022 unemployment rate for Southbridge was 5.5% (down from 9.0 % in 2021). The Commonwealth unemployment rate is 3.8% and the national rate is 3.5%.

Southbridge Educational Resources

According to the Southbridge Public Schools District Turnaround Plan, November 22, 2022, the Southbridge Public Schools seek to provide all students with a "...world-class education and will graduate as engaged citizens who demonstrate the essential skills required for success in college and career".⁷ The District was placed in receivership by the State Department of Education in early 2016. Administration and faculty turnover has been significant in the Southbridge Public Schools. The District has been restructured into a total of 5 schools. Eastford Road (Preschool and Kindergarten), Charlton Street and West Street Schools (Elementary), Southbridge Middle School and Southbridge High School and Southbridge Academy. The total enrollment for the 2022-23 school year is 1,809, down from 2,228 in 2010. Bay Path Regional Vocational High School is in nearby Charlton has an enrollment of 1,158 (2022-2023) of Southbridge students.

⁵ "QuickFacts: Southbridge Town city, Massachusetts; United States." U.S. Census Bureau, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/southbridgetowncitymassachusetts.US/PST045219> .

⁶ MassGIS. "MassGIS Data: 2020 Environmental Justice Populations." Mass.Gov, Nov. 2022, www.mass.gov/info-details/massgis-data-2020-environmental-justice-populations.

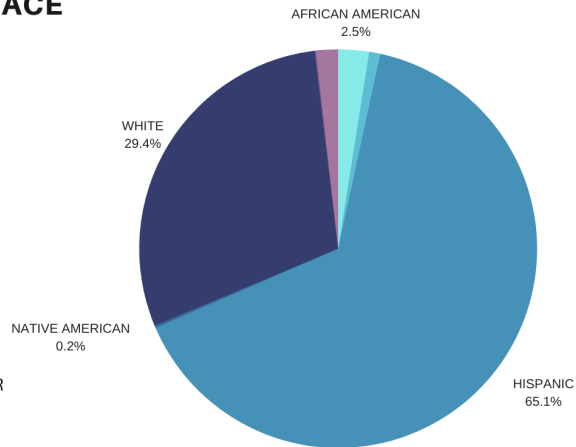
⁷ "Receivership Documents." Southbridge Public Schools, www.southbridgepublic.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=2059326&type=d&pREC_ID=2123433.

A non-binding question was on the ballot for the June 13, 2023 town election regarding ending the Receivership. It received 87% support.

SOUTHBRIDGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS STUDENT ENROLLMENT BY RACE

2022-2023 DOE DATA

- AFRICAN AMERICAN
- ASIAN
- HISPANIC
- NATIVE AMERICAN
- WHITE
- NATIVE HAWAIIAN, PACIFIC ISLANDER
- MULTI-RACE, NON-HISPANIC



School choice has been operating in Southbridge for some years, and has reduced the student enrollment. Currently, there are four districts outside of Southbridge that are favored, and consequently depletes the remaining student population in Southbridge.

In FY17 the Dual-Language Program was introduced and the Library continues its commitment to resourcing the program with materials supporting the curriculum. Southbridge is one of 19 districts in Massachusetts to offer a dual-language program.⁸

An ongoing initiative is a library card drive to enable all students to use the library resources. Staff is responsive to invitations from the faculty to conduct outreach – for example to attend parent teacher events and assemblies. Occasionally, faculty accompany students to the Library for research and tours.

⁸ “Dual Language Program.” Southbridge Public Schools, https://www.southbridgepublic.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=2059554&type=d&pREC_ID=2173992.

Old Sturbridge Academy, a charter school established in 2017, offers education for grades K-8. Trinity Catholic School, Early Head Start, Head Start, and YMCA day care programs also offer learning opportunities. Quinsigamond Community College is located in the Southbridge Middle High School building and offers classes in business, technology, health care, human services, liberal arts and ESL (English as a Second Language).

The Jacob Edwards Library

Library service has been available to Southbridge residents since the 1860s in the Globe Village section of the town. In 1904, Jacob Edwards, a native of Southbridge, provided the land and the bequest to build at the current location. Continual services have been provided to the townspeople from 236 Main Street since 1914, except for a two-year hiatus in the Town Hall basement during remodeling and expansion of the building in 1998-2000.

The original brick building of Georgian Colonial style was erected in 1914, and included approximately 8,260 square feet of usable space. In 1966 an addition was built, bringing the building to approximately 13,000 square feet of usable space. In 1997, Southbridge was awarded a \$1.14 million Massachusetts Public Library Construction grant which increased the total space to 24,465 square feet, with nearly matched funding from the Town and private donations. This expansion provided a modern, air conditioned and accessible building which reopened in May 2000.

Library Facilities

The library is a municipal building, and the Town of Southbridge has responsibility for its maintenance and upkeep. Preventative maintenance is practiced in order to sustain this significant municipal asset. The library has three levels and a commanding presence on the corner of Main and Foster Streets. There are 38 dedicated parking spaces plus on-street parking and overflow parking in the area. There is seating for 120 patrons.

Jacob Edwards Library public meeting rooms are available for educational, literary, philanthropic and civic purposes. The Pioppi Room can accommodate groups of up to 65 people and has an audiovisual and sound system. The Mills Room is a conference-style room, and can accommodate up to 12 people, and the Periodicals Room up to 8 people. There are two quiet study rooms available for public use as well. All public use rooms are configured as meeting and study spaces. The heart of the library is the Reading Room, a welcoming and flexible open-plan space on the first floor that can be used for programs, quiet reading or group gatherings.

A major development is planned to design and install a chess park on the Main Street side of the building which will augment the weekly Southbridge Chess Club meeting that is held at the Library.

Technology

The library provides free access to the Internet, including barrier-free, 24/7 Wi-Fi access. There are 6 computers available for public use and wireless access has been increased throughout the building and to the perimeter of the property. As the community has increased access to technology and the Internet, the number of public access computers has been reduced. According to Census information, in Southbridge, 88.3% of households have a computer, and 85.3% of households have a broadband Internet subscription.⁹ Additionally, during COVID, to offset the digital divide, the School District provided every student with a Chromebook. This technology program continues.

A new printer/scanner/copier for public use has been installed this year. Mobile printing is a popular service, particularly with Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) patrons who have traveled quite a distance (as appointments are easier to schedule in Southbridge).

A new website was built in 2022 and is mobile-friendly. Through combined regional, state, and network sources, many online information resources are available for general and specialized research. Hotspots are available for patrons to borrow. The library has a microfilm reader for viewing, scanning, and printing 35 mm film, mostly for local genealogical and historical research. A book-a-librarian service is available for patrons who need extra help accessing resources. A Switch console is available for patron gaming. There is an initiative to install fiber optic connectivity. A grant to fund a feasibility study has been applied for and \$100,000 of ARPA funds have been secured as well.

Adult Services and Teen Services

The upper levels of the library house collections and services for the adults and teens in the community. The library provides access to more than physical collections – eBooks and other downloadable materials are available and have become increasingly popular since the pandemic. The expenditure on eContent is increasing, in response to demand. The library offers programming and workshops on a variety of topics throughout the year. A rotating monthly art

⁹ "QuickFacts: Southbridge Town city, Massachusetts; United States." U.S. Census Bureau, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/southbridgetowncitymassachusetts.US/PST045219> .

exhibit provides exposure for local artists and craftspeople, and fosters a symbiotic relationship between creators and the community.

The library also offers research assistance to students at local schools and colleges, as well as general interest research help. A proctoring service was added due to demand. Library staff has worked cooperatively with the Southbridge Public Schools to deepen the relationship. The library has also established a cooperative partnership with Quinsigamond Community College, which has a satellite campus in Southbridge, providing research assistance and study space.

Jacob Edwards Library works closely with and provides referral services to a number of community and social services agencies, in partnership with other organizations. Services include the Literacy Volunteers of South-Central Massachusetts, to whom the library provides office and tutoring space in addition to a web presence, as an in-kind donation. The library also provides space to facilitate access to the community for the WCAC Fuel Assistance program to meet with local clients and QCC Accounting Department has continued the tax preparation program for middle-low income families that AARP used to provide. The library also participates in the tax-abatement program and works with Tradewinds/Open Sky clients to assist staff in the food service program.

Programming

The library has diverse and sustained programming which includes the weekly knitting program which began in 2006 and is going strong, and latest additions: a chess instruction and game playing to the afternoon author talks, and book club. The Library has plans to offer a 12-part series of practical life-experience type programming to be funded by the Board of Trustees. The Library is in the process of developing a Programming Policy. Passive programming includes a community jigsaw puzzle that is changed out at least monthly and chess boards for impromptu games. Dominos is underway and sets are strategically placed for drop-in play.

Summer Reading programs are run every year for all age groups in the community to encourage our patrons to read through incentives, generously funded by the Friends of the Jacob Edwards Library (FOJEL). The library also engages with the local schools to obtain the assigned summer reading books, ensuring that multiple copies are available for students over the course of the summer. Community and social service needs are further met by the library's partnership with Project Bread and the Summer Food Service Programs. The library serves as a site for free lunch during the summer for anyone under 18.

Teens

Concerted efforts have been made to attract teens to the Library to attend programs and utilize Library services – monthly Take & Makes are provided and have proven popular; a Dungeons & Dragons series is scheduled; passive activities such as coloring, games, and puzzles are offered; and partnerships for programming with community organizations such as the Trails Committee, Veterans Services, and You Inc., among others have been explored. Efforts have been made to start a Teen Advisory Group which will provide staff with feedback on programming and materials selection.

Children’s Services

The Children’s Department, located on the ground level, offers a complete range of print and nonprint materials, in addition to the digital download options. A substantial collection of bilingual books in Spanish and side by side Spanish-English titles are available to support the dual language program in the school district.

The department serves children from birth through age 12. There is a space to work on computers, including three AWE Early Literacy stations, an online catalog, and comfortable places to sit and read. The library focuses on creative play and has a dress-up area. The décor in the room is thematically changed and refreshed to welcome inclusion. A generous donation in 2022 allowed the library to commission an original art piece by Audrey Helen Weber which augments the area.

Story hours, holiday activities, special entertainers, seasonal craft programs, and school vacation specials are offered throughout the year. Focusing on STEM-based activities and Tinkering has added a new dimension to programs offered for children. An ongoing partnership with the YMCA and YFCP (YMCA Family and Community Partnership) has provided the ever-popular Wiggles and Giggles, STEM, and other events to entertain and delight the community.

Additionally, a working relationship with Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF) has been established to allow the library to be a safe, friendly place for some family visits.

Library-By-The-Numbers

The following information provides a brief overview of the Jacob Edwards Library. It includes data from the ARIS FY2023, the last year self-reported compiled statistics are available from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC).

274,558 Total collection (including e-content)	88,602 Physical holdings	2,363 Total hours open	36,906 Total visits
4.76 Holdings per capita in print		7 PT Employees	5 FT Employees
41,393 Total circulations		8.5 FTE	15 Average volunteer hours per week
13,043 Interlibrary Loans provided	3,935 Interlibrary Loans received	33 Adult Programs (in person)	3,829 Attendees
4 Adult Internet Workstations	3 Young Adult Internet Workstations	2 Teen Programs (in person)	25 Attendees
3 Children's Internet Workstations	3 Children's Early Literacy Stations	82 Children's Programs (in person)	3,769 Attendees
2,652 Total Computer Usage		6 All Ages Programs (in person)	696 Attendees
10 JEL Databases	13,672 Database Usage	268 Virtual Programs	7,472 Attendees
5 Wireless Access Points	4,362 WiFi Sessions		

General Collections

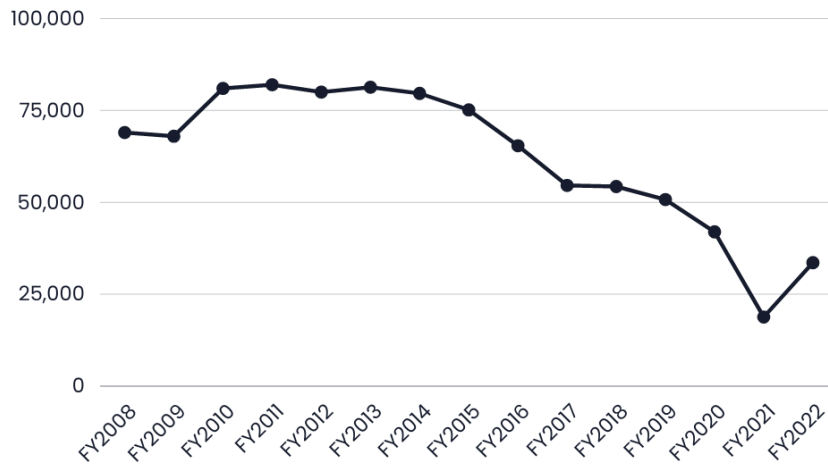
According to the FY2023 ARIS Report, there are approximately 77,751 print books in the Jacob Edwards Library, as well as newspapers, videos, audiobooks, CDs, and videogames. Not included in this number is the vast amount of eContent available via the website - 196,807 items. Libraries throughout the state share their digital collections, making for a large catalog of choices and facilitates a quick turnaround on requests. The library subscribes to newspapers, in addition to the rich database offerings accessible from any location. There are Spanish language

collections in the adult, teen and children's areas. Print magazines and CDs have been discontinued due to lack of use. Electronic versions of over 4,000 magazines are available through Libby. Libraries across the state have cooperatively pooled their electronic resources and provide access to all regions. Circulation of traditional materials decreased during COVID-19 but as the graph below demonstrates, there was a corresponding increase in digital circulation.

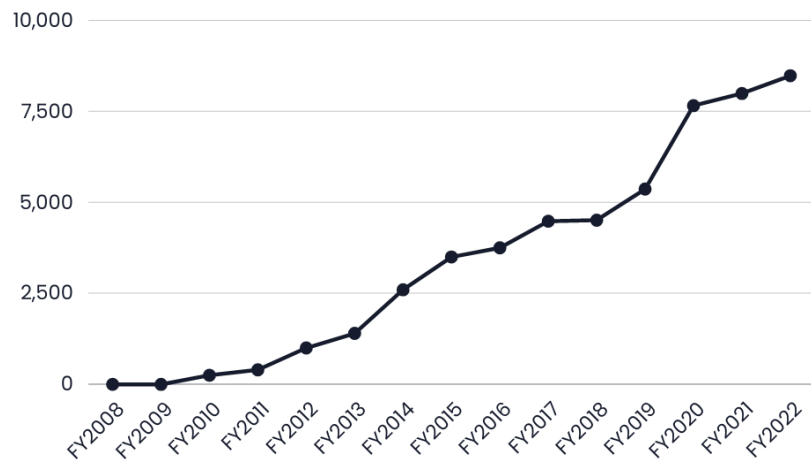
Regular reviews are conducted of the collection by the Adult Services Librarian and Children's Librarian, facilitated by the reporting module in the Evergreen Integrated Library System (ILS) which provides comprehensive reports on inventory and use of the collection, to facilitate the evaluation. The collection has also been evaluated to better meet the needs of the community. Selectors utilize approved professional tools to purchase and deselect materials, on an ongoing basis to keep the collection attractive and relevant. The staff continues to conduct an ongoing inventory to gain a more accurate overview on the total collection.

The Ammidown History Room contains the Ammidown Collection, the Genealogy and Local History collections, and various collections of historic photographs. The Ammidown Collection is an 18th-century gentleman's library that belonged to Holmes Ammidown, a prominent early citizen of Southbridge. Through the years, various projects have been completed to digitize some of these significant collections, including recently digitizing some 8mm home movies from the Eugene Livernois collection. The next project is to fundraise for and digitize a 35mm film, commissioned by The Strand Theatre, of the founding of Sacred Heart Church in the early 1900s. In addition to the Internet Archive and Digital Commonwealth, materials have also been made available on Flickr platform. Gifts and donations from the community have facilitated a small increase to the collection. An orientation to the Town's history is available on the Library's website, providing access to many digitized resources, as well as a bibliography of Town historical texts, and a variety of early maps. Staff has been working with the Local Historical District Study Committee (LHDSC) to document historical buildings and markers.

Traditional Circulation



Digital Circulation



Library of Things

The library offers an assorted collection of objects that can be used in the library or borrowed for a short period. Included are hotspots, a Switch game console, snow shoes, a telescope, EnChroma glasses, Dungeons & Dragons kits, and jigsaw puzzles, and items are continuously added.

Networks

Jacob Edwards Library staff is an active participant in the Massachusetts Library System (MLS) and takes advantage of the training programs offered in-person and via webinar. Access to services provided through the membership include delivery of library materials, interlibrary loan (ILL), reference support services, online databases with remote access, and summer reading program support and materials.

Southbridge is a full, circulating member of the Central Western Massachusetts Automated Resource Sharing (C/WMARS) network, connecting Southbridge and its patrons with over 150 other libraries in the consortium. The library subscribes to PC Desktop service offered by the network, in an effort to make the computers more secure. Cybersecurity is an increasing concern for municipalities and public libraries.

Library Hours

The Library is open Mondays and Thursdays from 9 am-8 pm, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 9 am-5 pm, and Saturdays from 9 am-1 pm. The library is closed on Saturdays during the summer months (Memorial Day through Labor Day).

Library Staffing Levels FY2023

Education levels of staff include 2 MLS, 1 MS, 4 Bachelor's degrees, and 2 Associate's degrees. One staff member recently completed the Basic Library Techniques training program. In general, staff avail of training webinars to stay abreast of current trends and developments.

Friends of the Library

The Friends of the Jacob Edwards Library is a subscription-based organization with 83 members that provides advocacy and financial support of the Library, for example, museum passes and funding of some of the library's adult, teen and children's programs. The group also runs an ongoing book sale, with an annual book sale every May. In 2022, the group reorganized.

Private Support

The Jacob Edwards Library is fortunate to receive private support from existing Trust Funds established by the Edwards family and other private organizations and individuals. Approximately \$45,000 is contributed annually to offset approximately fifty percent of the cost of the materials (for example books and eContent). In addition, generous donations and bequests from private donors are used to sponsor programs and improvements to the Library building and grounds.

Process/Planning Methodology

The JEL Trustees and Library Director took on the task of developing the JEL Strategic Plan. The Plan will cover the years of 2023-2028. The Trustees and Library staff reviewed the previous strategic plan and discussed their goals and vision for the library. The Board of Trustees met to approve the design of the survey and met on several occasions to discuss and review the plan in detail. A total of five drafts of the plan were shared with the Board and feedback incorporated into the narrative before the final version of the plan was approved at the June 2023 meeting of the Board.

The online survey format was selected as the general comfort level of the population with technology has increased significantly and it would reach users and nonusers. The survey was posted on the library's website, sent out in library email newsletters (1,623 subscribers), posted to the library's Facebook page (2,038 followers), on four separate occasions, and shared via a QR code located on flyers around the Library. Staff also actively invited completion of paper surveys in the library building, both to regular users and nonusers (such as RMV visitors). An invitation to participate and complete the survey was sent via email to special interest groups, town departments and stakeholders such as Friends of JEL, Literacy Volunteers, and social service agencies with which the Library interacts regularly. 107 surveys were completed in total.

Results of the survey were used to determine what library services the community valued and what was envisioned for the future. Survey results were used as a basis for library long-range planning. Survey results are attached as an appendix to this Long-Range Plan.

The Board of Library Trustees formally adopted the Long Range Plan on June 27, 2023.

Highlights of Changes in the Previous Five Years

- Many staff positions have been turned over due to the pandemic, retirements and so forth. The Library is currently fully staffed.
- Curbside Delivery was added as a new service that became permanent when it was recognized as a filling a vital need - parents with small children, immunocompromised and disabled patrons among others.
- In line with other libraries, fines are no longer charged for items except for Library of Things items.
- RMV staff direct multiple customers to the library for their printing needs, on a daily basis. Library staff often spend a significant amount of time assisting people who need help utilizing mobile printing functions.
- Emphasis on staff training and cross-training.
- JEL is a stop on the WRTA Bus Route. Library staff provide bus hub services – answering questions, providing the schedule, and supporting the Bustracker technology.
- Added a wireless access point (WAP) during the pandemic to make a total of five throughout the Library.
- Hotspots were introduced through a federal program and are now funded by the Library.
- A new website was designed and launched in 2022.
- Broadcast programs via Facebook Live and record them for YouTube.
- Began posting to Instagram account to reach a wider audience, in particular the teen population
- Afternoon programming was added to meet the needs of patrons who were not served by evening programming.
- Book club with a generalist theme was reestablished in 2022 and is slowly building up a following.
- Active interest in STEM and Tinkering programs.
- Lunch served via the Summer Feeding Program in the Children’s Room.
- Outreach to the business community, such as attending Southbridge Business Partnership meetings.
- Forged strong connections with local agencies, organizations and the school district.
- Replaced two Roof Top Units (RTUs) as part of the HVAC system. Upgraded the elevator, and a new fire inspection service was contracted.
- Two metal sculptures installed: Reaching for a Star by Dale Rogers Studio (commissioned) and Tin Man by John M. Lewis (donation). Illumination was added (LCC grant from Southbridge Cultural Council) in 2023 and also improves the streetscape.

Assessment of Community Needs

Through outreach to various groups, Staff, Trustees, and Friends become aware of community needs.

- Participation in community events such as Healthy Kids Day – YMCA, trail clean ups, Memorial Flag placement, and so forth.
- An active connection to the Southbridge School Department and area schools, prompted by the large number of local students who utilize school choice.
- Connecting with the Recreation Department and Council on Aging to reach senior citizens.
- Working closely with ASPIRA to liaise with the Spanish-speaking community.
- Annual Pride events to establish inclusiveness in the community.
- Co-sponsoring events of all kinds with other area libraries.
- Liaising with the human and social service agencies to identify community needs.
- Connecting with the business community.
- Monthly promotion of individual services in the digital newsletter - such as devices to play talking books, magnifier, proctoring, book-a-librarian and referral service.

Goals, Objectives & Activities

1. **Satisfy Curiosity: Lifelong Learning & Creativity**
2. **Celebrate Diversity: Cultural Awareness**
3. **Visit a Comfortable Place: Physical and Virtual Spaces**
4. **Provide Public Internet Access and Connectivity**

Satisfy Curiosity: Lifelong Learning & Creativity

The aspiration of the library is to create a space and environment conducive to learning for self-directed personal growth and lifelong learning.

Objective 1: Initiate & develop resources and relationships to support educational entities and other community organizations.

- Evaluate the library's Collection Development Policy on an ongoing basis, to reflect digital, as well as print collection needs
- Bolster the Collection Development Policy and develop a Programming Policy to protect against potential challenges.
- Provide authoritative information to serve community needs
- Through its collections and its programming, recognizing the importance of offering diverse perspectives
- Expand on traditional library resources and materials to serve a 21st century community
- Support the Southbridge School District, including private schools, charter schools, school choice and home-schooled students, as well as Bay Path Vocational Technical High School
- Continue to provide physical space and work cooperatively with the Literacy Volunteers of South Central Massachusetts.

Objective 2: Expand promotion of the unique aspects of the library

- Harness the power of social media and e-newsletter, and video.
- Create attractive promotional materials to facilitate engagement with the community.
- Work to build the Friends of the Jacob Edwards Library organization further.

Objective 3: Make the library a welcoming and relevant place

- Continue to develop a collection of the best books, movies, music, graphic novels and video games and any emerging formats
- Maintain and update the library's website, and reach out with social media
- Incentivize the Summer Reading program to be relevant to all ages
- Maintain connections with local human and social service agencies
- Promote and encourage attendance at programs and events for various age groups, to encourage the community to be stakeholders
- Develop programs and collections for non-English speakers
- Create a list of resources for unhoused patrons

Objective 4: The library will help support community interest in Southbridge historic materials

- Staff will endeavor to continue cataloging the materials in the Ammidown Room to increase accessibility.
- Seek opportunities to continue to digitize local historical materials and promote existing digitized collections
- Continue to partner with the Southbridge Historical Society and Southbridge Historical Commission and the Southbridge Historical District Study Committee to preserve important materials
- Facilitate the use of the historical resources of the library and continue efforts to catalog the materials.

Objective 5: Increase library card holders

- Promote the value of a library card and its benefits via social media and at outreach events to reach a wider non-library user audience.
- Reach out to the School District to encourage students to obtain library cards and organize library card drives.
- Work with existing card holders to bring their cards back into compliance.

Celebrate Diversity: Cultural Awareness

The library's role is to promote inclusion and understanding in the community. To that end, heritage and cultural traditions will be represented in the library's collection and programming, with a view to promoting acceptance and inclusion. Encourage staff to attend cultural sensitivity training.

Objective 1: The library will offer monthly programs and/or showcase exhibits on various aspects of the cultural heritage of our community

- Maintain a strong connection with the Southbridge Cultural Council
- Apply for grant(s) to increase the mix of programs offered to patrons
- Host cultural events that include seasonal and ethnic events, such as Black History Month, Women’s History Month, Pride Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and so forth.

Objective 2: Increase multicultural collections

- Increase Spanish language and cultural materials
- Evaluate community ethnic statistics and adjust collection development accordingly
- Develop an ethnic history collection reflecting the cultural heritage of the town

Objective 3: Develop Spanish language materials and signage for the library

- The library will make available library promotional materials in Spanish
- Assemble a welcome packet, in English and Spanish, containing community information of interest to new residents and immigrants for distribution
- The Trustees will assist in funding a promotional campaign for multicultural outreach

Objective 4: As a result of marketing services of the library, increase usage by non-library users

- Develop and/or maintain relationships with churches and other places of worship
- Develop a marketing plan to make library services attractive to the unserved and underserved in the community
- Increase visibility in the community through outreach opportunities
- Consider hiring a professional service to design and implement promotional materials

Visit a Comfortable place: Physical and Virtual Spaces

Patrons need a safe, comfortable place to sit, read and relax, appropriate place to use and consult library materials, and to confidently navigate the Library’s electronic materials – including the website.

Objective 1: Maintain current facilities to provide a welcoming space to meet the needs of the community

- Repurpose existing spaces to meet the changing and growing needs of users
- Coordinate repairs to physical plant in cooperation with the DPW and focus on preventative maintenance
- Develop an ongoing plan for physical plant maintenance
- In a 109-year old building, capital improvement is vital to maintaining the attractiveness and function of the building for the community

Objective 2: Provide a safe, secure environment for staff and patrons

- Ensure user and staff safety, and make improvements as needed, to fulfill duty of care and support staff
- Work cooperatively with the Southbridge Police Department
- Staff to be trained in disaster preparedness, safety procedures, substance abuse and mental health behaviors, and de-escalation techniques to assist in dealing with challenging situations
- Allow for a minimum of two half-day all-staff training.

Objective 3: Make a welcoming experience for all patrons

- All staff will strive to make each library experience a positive one for each patron
- Facilitate staff to participate in all training opportunities, particularly those in customer service and patron behavior
- Create and sustain a friendly, upbeat, team, ready to assist and provide a satisfactory conclusion to each patron's experience.

Provide Public Internet Access and Connectivity

The library is committed to keeping abreast of changes in information technology, and will endeavor to ensure that staff and the public have the training and tools necessary to successfully navigate digital resources.

Objective 1: Focus on the website as 24/7 branch of the library

- Continually update with any and all current information and services
- Website should facilitate patron self-discovery of library resources

Objective 2: Digitize materials for increased accessibility

- Endeavor to fund and digitize more of the archive
- Continue to increase accessibility of the library processes by providing digital interface

Objective 3: Promote and increase usage of online database collection

- Market database collection through eNewsletter and provide outreach to educational institutions
- Continue to offer a Book-a-Librarian Service to teach patrons about databases and other technology

Objective 4: Staff training

- Encourage and facilitate staff to stay current with technology training
- Allow staff time to participate in webinars and online training

Objective 5: Maintain current technology for patron use

- Develop plan to replace existing PCs every five (5) years, and other IT equipment as needed
- Explore opportunities to use Open Source software

Staff Needs

A competent, well-trained staff is the essence of good customer service. As we recover from the pandemic experience, the Library has rebuilt the staff and facilitated a team environment. It is recognized that changing technology creates a dynamic environment to which staff needs to respond. The Library's vision of becoming "the place to be with something for everyone" requires that we embrace our community, respond to needs efficiently and with empathy. To achieve this, the following objectives are noted:

- Customer service and safety training continues to be our priority
- Continue to provide an in-service two half day trainingsContinue with staff cross-training so that flexibility among departments can continue
- Encourage participation within the library community, including attending conferences, participating in webinars, round table discussions on specific topics, and professional development training opportunities offered
- Aspire to increase the number of Spanish-speaking staff
- Provide technology training as needed, and encourage staff to keep their skills honed
- Perform outreach within the community

LRP Survey Data

As part of the strategic planning process for the plan year 2023-2028, the Library Trustees conducted a survey of patrons. The survey was promoted for two months on site at the library, as well as through social media and outreach to high school students and municipal colleagues. The results of the survey were analyzed, and used to formulate objective goals.

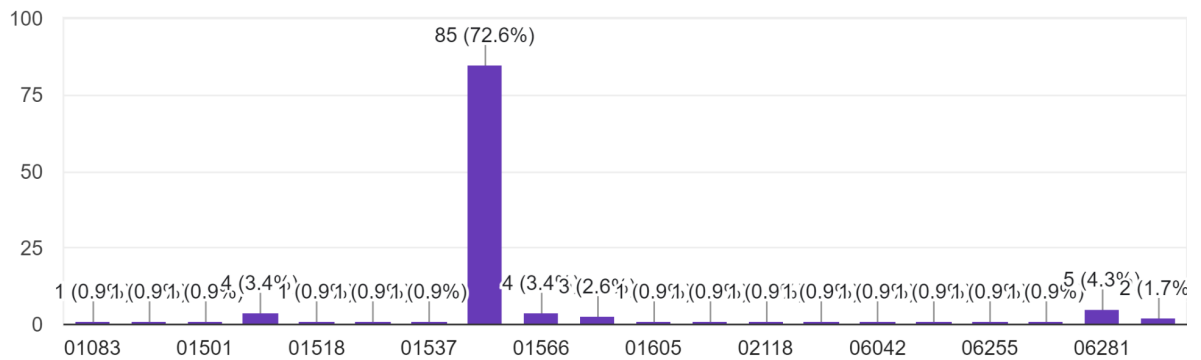
A total of 117 surveys were completed.

Survey Participants

85 of the respondents were Southbridge residents.

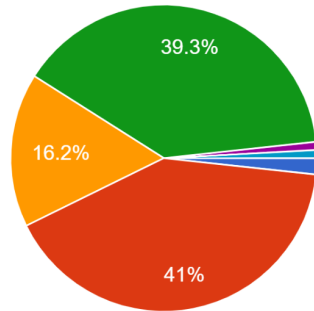
Enter your zip code:

117 responses



How would you describe yourself?

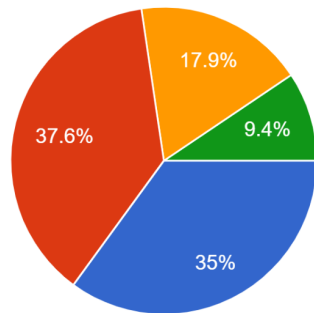
117 responses



- Student
- Adult (18 and up)
- Adult with small children
- Retired
- Retired w grandchildren
- Retired pastor doing pulpity supply, funerals and grief support

How often do you use the Library?

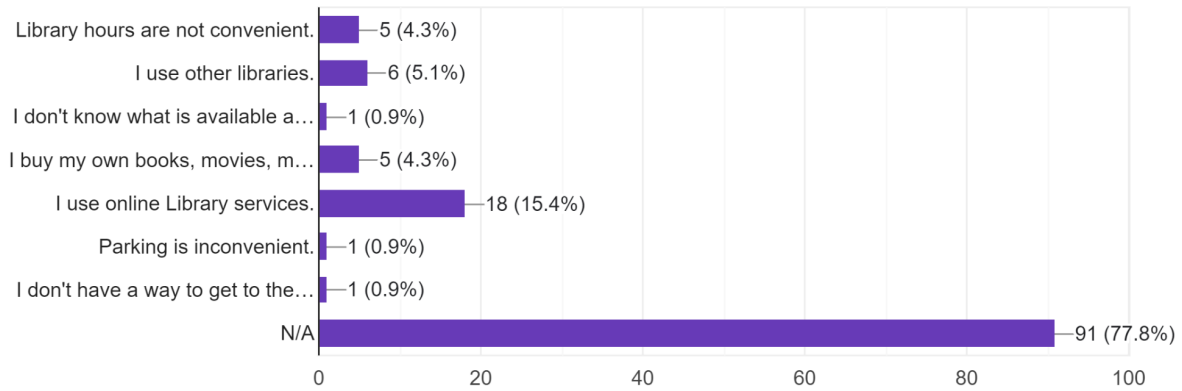
117 responses



- At least once per week.
- At least once per month.
- One or two times per year.
- I do not use the Library.

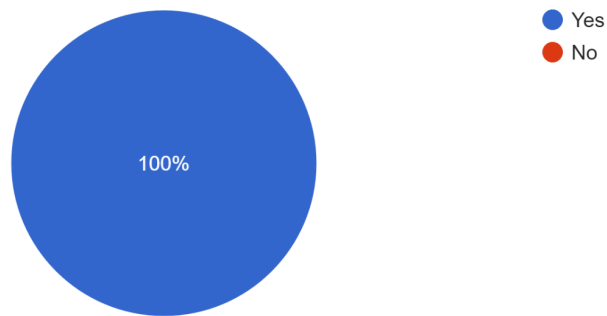
If you chose "I do not use the Library" above, please select the reasons:

117 responses



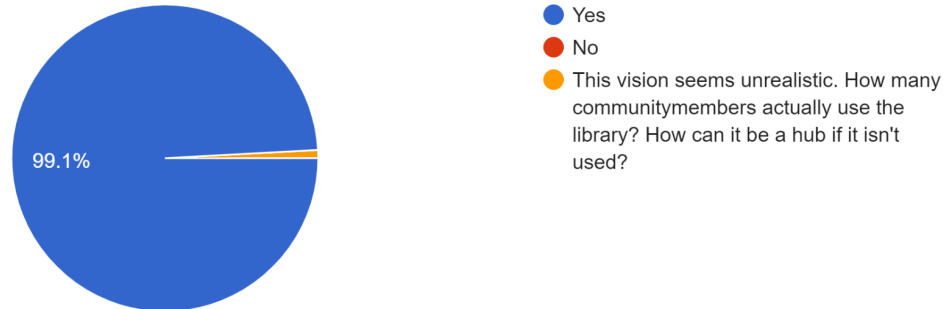
Do you agree with the current mission of the Library? "To provide excellent service and to promote reading, education, literacy, culture, and lifelong learning for persons of all ages in our community."

117 responses



Do you agree with the vision of the Library, which is that it will act as the community place to be, a hub for any and all of our community residents to gather, learn, and discover?

117 responses



Most Valued Service

Survey participants were asked to rank the service they used the most, by rating a list of possible answers 1-6 (6 as most important). Each service was ranked by the survey.

1. Attending Children’s programs and events
2. To research using Library resources (databases, reference material, etc.)
3. Borrowing books, movies, and other materials.
4. Using Library technology (computers, Wi-Fi, etc.)
5. Attending programs for adults.
6. As a comfortable place to visit, relax and learn.
7. To learn about community resources.

What would you like to see the Library offer the community?

56 respondents did not comment.

Most comments were complimentary of the current services. Some suggestions were made for services and programs that the Library already provides, such as a knitting group, a book club, and self-checkout. Several suggestions mentioned life skill presentations. One respondent suggested “expansion of multilingual facilities” and another suggested the Library “offer book and materials delivery to housebound.” One respondent requested a “class on Adobe Premiere Pro” and another requested “charging stations for cell phones.”

Do you have suggestions on how to reach out for new users?

67 respondents did not comment.

Most respondents referenced using social media to promote the Library. Many respondents suggested having promotional materials at various locations around town - Town Hall, realtors,

schools, elderly housing management office, Senior Center, “Chamber of commerce... hospital... churches.”, etc., along with signage outside of the Library announcing events. Several respondents suggested materials and programs in Spanish.