



WHITINSVILLE SOCIAL LIBRARY STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FISCAL YEARS 2024–2028

Submitted by:



Whitinsville Social Library
Northbridge's Public Library

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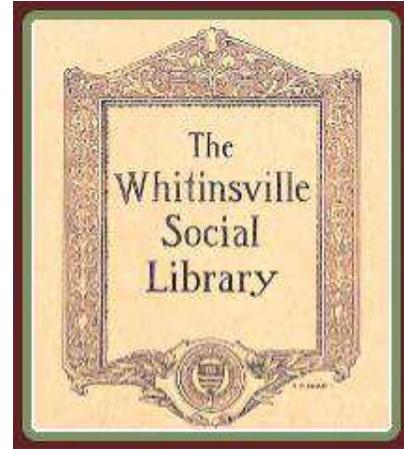
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INTRODUCTION

In 1876, Whitinsville Social Library (WSL) became the public library for the town of Northbridge. With an institution as longstanding in the community as its public library, it's imperative that we look to our stakeholders, community, and users (past, current, and future) to create goals WSL must focus on for the next five years.

As this Plan showcases, one of the biggest requests from our community is for more space. Surveys show people want space in the Library for programming and events, meetings, studying, or work. Staff also desire adequate private spaces for breaks, storage, and working.



The historic Library building will require an expansion to create more space. An up-to-date Strategic Plan is required to be eligible for the state-funded construction project through the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners.

OUR PLANNING PROCESS

The Library's previous Strategic Plan expired at the end of fiscal year 2019. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic delayed working on a new strategic plan. In the fall of 2021, the WSL Board of Trustees decided to hire a consultant to work with Library Director Rebecca Sasseville on an updated strategic plan. Barbara Alevras of Sage Consulting Services was hired in November 2021.

In January 2022, Ms. Sasseville recruited eight community members to join the Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC). Chaired by Ms. Sasseville, SPAC members included:

- Kelly Bol, Director of the Northbridge Council on Aging
- Ethan Drutchas, Pastor at the Village Congregational Church
- Adam Gaudette, Northbridge Town Manager
- Karen Gibson, Library Assistant
- Jeannie Hebert, President, Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce
- Tien Meehl, Library Patron
- Sharyn Tritone, Northbridge Elementary School Family and Community Liaison
- Celia Walker, High School Student and Library Volunteer

In February, the SPAC met virtually to participate in a SOAR exercise, which is an internal assessment activity. In March, the committee met again to participate in a community visioning exercise. The community visioning exercise results are presented in *Appendix C—WSL Community Vision Statement Results Report 2022*.

To assess the community we serve and our role in it, the Library solicited residents' feedback via a series of activities, including:

- **Community Survey:** An online and hard-copy survey was conducted from March 1-15. The 21-question survey had 254 responses, including feedback from many residents who had not used the Library since before COVID-19. Survey results are presented in *Appendix E—WSL Community Survey Results Summary Report 2022*.
- **Focus Groups:** In the online survey, several respondents volunteered to offer more insight by attending a focus group. In April, two virtual focus groups were conducted in which six participants were asked 12 detailed questions regarding current and potential new Library offerings. The sessions yielded more granular feedback than the online survey. Focus group results are presented in *Appendix F—WSL Focus Group Summary Report 2022*.
- **SOAR Exercises:** In spring 2022, three virtual SOAR exercises were conducted with the: 1) SPAC, 2) Library staff, and 3) Board of Trustees. A SOAR exercise is used to analyze current and future conditions that affect the Library and its ability to provide services it deems necessary. It identifies key Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results. SOAR exercise results are presented in *Appendix G—WSL SOAR Exercise Summary Results Report 2022*.

In addition to collecting feedback, the Library compiled key statistics and background information about Northbridge and WSL. Profiles of the community and Library are presented in *Appendix B—Community & Library Overview Infographics 2022*.

OUR PLAN

Community Vision Statement

The Library's nine-person SPAC brainstormed a series of vision statements reflecting the ideal Northbridge and prioritized the vision statements to identify those the Library can best support and positively impact.

Following is the community vision statement the committee selected:

Northbridge offers unique and diverse free and low-cost accessible cultural, recreational, and social activities, programs, and services that appeal to all ages.

The full community visioning exercise results are presented in *Appendix C—WSL Community Vision Statement Results Report 2022*.

Mission Statement

The Whitinsville Social Library serves the entire Northbridge community as a welcoming place that enlightens, informs, and entertains. We strive to connect people to a variety of library materials, resources and experiences that support lifelong learning and literacy.

Strategic Goals and Supporting Objectives

GOAL 1: The Library's National Registered historic facility is a welcoming place that meets the community's needs.

- 1.1 Create comfortable, quiet places for all ages to read, study, meet, and work.
- 1.2 Maintain safe, sustainable, and high-performing facility infrastructure and systems (HVAC et al.).
- 1.3 Optimize Library space configuration and utilization to accommodate the needs of young children, teens, and families.
- 1.4 Meet patron and staff technological needs (e.g., Wi-Fi strength, plugs/charging stations).

GOAL 2: The Library is an important information and services resource for Northbridge residents.

- 1.5 Maintain staff areas that support the organization's operations.
- 2.1 Cultivate strong, collaborative relationships with local organizations and town departments that serve community needs.
- 2.2 Increase awareness and use of the local history collection.
- 2.3 Improve local adults' digital, media, and computer literacy.

GOAL 3: The Library will be the go-to destination for families.

- 3.1 Ensure the staffing level is sufficient to meet the needs of local children and their families.
- 3.2 Offer programs that interest, educate, and entertain children and their caregivers.
- 3.3 Improve local early childhood education.

GOAL 4: Library offerings will meet the community's evolving needs and interests.

- 4.1 Offer collections, programs, and services that support the needs of community members with diverse backgrounds, abilities, and interests.
- 4.2 Offer hands-on STEAM education programs for all ages.
- 4.3 Increase teen and adult Library support (e.g., advocacy and volunteerism).
- 4.4 Expand non-traditional physical and digital collections (e.g., Library of Things, online resources).
- 4.5 Ensure policies and procedures support easy access to Library offerings (e.g., eliminate late fines).

Annual Action Plans

The WSL develops an annual Action Plan made up of specific activities and strategies designed to help the Library achieve its strategic goals. The Action Plan captures new initiatives and tasks designed to support the Library's specific objectives and address changing needs. The Library director updates and submits the Action Plan to the MBLC annually.

Measuring and Communicating Our Progress

The Library director will review progress toward achieving the Strategic Plan's directions, objectives, and activities quarterly. The director will communicate the progress to library staff at quarterly meetings and to the trustees at their bimonthly meetings. The director will also report on performance highlights from the calendar year to the community in the annual town report.

The Strategic Plan, including its appendices, is available publicly on the Library's website.

PLAN APPROVAL

On September 27, 2022 the Library's six-person Board of Trustees approved this Strategic Plan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the Whitinsville Social Library Board of Trustees, the Strategic Planning Advisory Committee members, Library staff, all 254 community members who responded to the community survey, and the two focus groups' participants. We appreciate your time and thoughtful feedback.



APPENDICES

Following is a list of Strategic Plan document appendices. They are available for download and review at the following link: <https://www.northbridgemass.org/whitinsville-social-library/pages/strategic-plan-fy24-28>

Appendix A—WSL Strategic Planning Project Process Flowchart: The flowchart presents the Library’s planning methodology, including the timeline, assessment mechanisms, and process participants.

Appendix B—Community & Library Overview Infographics 2022: This document presents infographics with key Northbridge community statistics and Whitinsville Social Library statistics related to its programs and services.

Appendix C—WSL Community Vision Statement Results Report 2022: The Library’s strategic planning advisory committee brainstormed a series of vision statements reflecting the ideal Northbridge and prioritized the vision statements the Library can best support and positively impact. The results of the committee’s activities are presented in this report.

Appendix D—WSL Action Plan Fiscal Year 2024: The Library’s Action Plan presents specific tasks for completion during the first year of the Strategic Plan.

Appendix E—WSL Community Survey Results Summary Report 2022: The community survey was conducted in March 2022. A summary of the results is presented in addition to graphs and charts.

Appendix F—WSL Focus Group Summary Report 2022: This report presents highlights of the feedback and ideas about the Library’s collections, services, and staff generated in two focus groups conducted with six community members.

Appendix G—WSL SOAR Exercise Summary Results Report 2022: This report documents the results of three environmental assessments of the Library’s strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results. One SOAR exercise was conducted with the Library’s staff, one with strategic planning advisory committee members, and one with the Board of Trustees.

