RED BANK
Public Library

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Strategic Plan for the Red Bank Public Library
2016-2020

Members of the Strategic Planning Committee

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In 2015, the Board of the Red Bank Public Library (Library) embarked on a process to develop a strategic plan for the Library. After several years of decreased funding, staffing turnover, and increased technological innovations, the Board and staff believed it was important to take a step back and reassess services, how well the needs of the community are met, and what is envisioned for the future of library services in Red Bank.

Strategic planning involves creating structures and implementing processes within an organization that make it compatible over the long term with the environment in which it transacts its affairs. The importance of formal planning has increased dramatically for organizations in general and public libraries in particular. To be successful, public libraries must prepare themselves going forward to deal with the vagaries of public funding, unrelenting technological change, and shifting demographic tides that alter the makeup of the Library community.

The purpose of this strategic planning process for the Library is to collect and analyze data that results in a course of action that will enable it to deal successfully with the challenges that it is likely to encounter over the next five years. A Strategic Planning Committee comprised of Library staff and trustees, Library Foundation members, and community representatives was convened to identify and consider these challenges, and to set long range goals intended to navigate a changing and challenging future. The resources of the Library and its communal environment were scrutinized to identify particular practices that would sustain this organization and contribute to the prosperity of the borough over the next 3- 5 years. The Committee also reviewed the steps that other public libraries have adopted to deal with current issues and projected environmental transformations that commonly confront these organizations.

Public Libraries Today

Available research conducted on the status of public libraries in the U.S. has consistently demonstrated that they top the list of valued public services. However, despite their appeal to the public, libraries also rank close to the bottom of services that taxpayers are willing to support. Consequently, public libraries have had to reduce their budgets while simultaneously improving the services they provide for children and young adults, addressing literacy and poor reading skills among adults, providing access to information about government services and tax forms, and offering access to computers for all.

Major Challenges

The public library as an important social institution is expected to provide much needed resources for communities, including education and training, job search resources, and Internet access. Because of the changes in the society that must be served, libraries have had to evolve. To this end, libraries have increased the number and variety of programs they offer. Public libraries also have supplemented their digital collections, including e-books and downloadable audio and video.

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In the current political and economic climate, public libraries find themselves in the position of defending and justifying their funding and continued existence to their stakeholders. The demonstration of value is becoming increasingly significant for the economic survival of public libraries. As new services have been developed and implemented, libraries must also inform the public about the availability of and access procedures to the new online classes and offerings such as streaming music and movies available 24 hours a day through the Library web site.

Libraries of all kinds need money. The amount of funding that a library receives directly influences the quality of the services it provides to its constituent community. The majority of funding for libraries comes from state and local sources, although federal funding also offers some critical assistance. Without a predictable source of funding, however, libraries are unable to create new programs for their patrons and, indeed, many specialized programs targeted to the needs of their communities are likely to be eliminated, including specific Red Bank programs like children's story time, yoga, children's and adult art classes and even ESL which depends upon library space for weekly classes.

In sum, like other public libraries in the U.S., the Library is confronted by three major challenges:
- It must maintain or increase the number of its patrons by expanding its facilities and services.
- The Library must prove its worth to the community it serves and justify its value to policy-makers.
- It must secure funding in order to enlarge its operations.

This strategic plan recommends a set of proposed Library goals and actions intended to directly address these three major challenges.

The Community of Red Bank

Red Bank's population has experienced moderate growth since 2000 and had a 2013 population of 12,213. The median age of Red Bank residents is 36.3 years, a bit younger than the state median age of 39.4 years. The population is ethnically diverse (50% White; 34% Hispanic; 12% Afro-American and 2% Asian). The Hispanic population has seen the most growth in recent years. Red Bank is a highly educated community with a higher percentage of residents with high school diplomas, college degrees and post-graduate degrees than the state as a whole.

Strong public transportation options make Red Bank an attractive community to commuters. With much of the manufacturing base gone, Red Bank has focused with great success on small business, entertainment, and arts and cultural activities. There is a vibrant organization that operates as a chamber of commerce, namely, the Red Bank RiverCenter, which brings collaboration and partnerships to the town, thereby increasing visitors that might visit the Library.

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The Red Bank Library

Since 1878, a library has been a part of the Red Bank community, first by private donation and, since 1923, by taxpayer support. Throughout its 138 year history the library has played a central role in the community life of Red Bank. Through each generation the library has grown and expanded, not just in size or collection, but in how it serves the community and in the very definition of what the library means to the community. As the community and our society have changed, so has the library. Happy childhood memories of the library abound in longtime residents – the Library has been an integral part of many generations of Red Bankers.

In recent years the Library Board and staff have struggled through several issues including budget pressures, staff turnover, reduction of hours, and uncertainty about the Library's future. Throughout this time the Library has received substantial community support. When committee members were asked how the Library should respond, it was clear that a high priority was to reassure patrons that the Library will continue to provide the services upon which they rely. However, it is also apparent that these services must be publicized in order to inform the greater Red Bank community about what the Library has to offer. Like any business in a competitive environment, the Library must advertise its services. What the Library offers, Amazon does not sell.

Mission

The services and programs of the Library create value for the Red Bank community by providing materials, information, technology, and cultural opportunities that enrich, empower, educate, and entertain people of all ages and backgrounds. To these ends, the Library recognizes its critical role as a provider of traditional reading materials and early childhood literacy support. Additionally, it embraces newer roles as a community engagement center, a technology resource, and a partner with the many organizations that give Red Bank its unique quality of life. The Library is committed to continued refinement of these activities and welcomes the challenges inherent in expanding its role in the future of Red Bank.

Budget

Total funding for the Library has dropped by about 20% since 2009. It is impossible for such a loss of funding not to have had an impact on library services and how they are used. The largest funding decreases were in minimum required funding (1/3 mill), discretionary municipal funding, and bequests. On a more positive note the value of 1/3 mill in Red Bank (on which the required minimum funding is based) has stopped its decline and begun to rise. The impact of the loss of revenue is most keenly felt in the reduction of hours – from a high of 51 hours per week in 2010 to the current 38 hours per week – the fewest number of weekly hours among any library in New Jersey serving a similar size community.

Library Use

Since 2012 circulation has decreased. This trend is not unique to Red Bank or to New Jersey, and is likely the result of the impact of smaller collection development budgets and changing reading habits. For example, adult circulation is trending down faster than children's. One reason supported by public input may be that adults in the community do not know about the substantial digital reading content provided by the Library and have not yet discovered their downloadable services. A bright spot in the Library's renewed focus on collection and service is a turnaround in circulation numbers. 2015 data reflected an increase across the board, responding, the staff feel, to the depth and breadth in the collection and the displays promoting this material.

Reduced hours have unfortunately impacted general circulation as well as the number of annual visits to the library. As of 2015, 25% of Red Bank residents are library card holders. In 2015 there were 44,117 library visits, 92 adult programs and 115 programs for children and/or young adults. In 2014 the Library's hours fell to their lowest in recent memory – 20 hours – but have climbed back up to 38 and visitors in 2016 are increasing. (To learn more about the library's current services please see the 2015 Annual Report (http://www.redbanklibrary.org/images/Board/Annual_Report_2015.pdf)).

Services to Children

Children's services are a popular part of the Library service program. The Children's Department is challenged to meet the needs of the growing number of Spanish speaking families with young children, particularly with Spanish language reading materials. Also, the loss of school librarians in the community has had an impact on the public library. There is a general expectation that the public library can replace the collection and information literacy services previously provided by the schools, but that is challenging to do without additional financial support.

A major trend in children's and young adult programming is the development of maker/creator spaces. These are very popular with children and relate directly to science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) curriculum goals. However, such programs are costly to develop, maintain, and staff. The Library sees development of services in this area as a high priority.

Technology and Social Media

Red Bank uses social media to promote awareness of its services but has not developed a comprehensive plan to grow social media presence and engagement. Currently, responsibilities for social media are distributed among staff. However, there is a need for a specific social media plan.

Red Bank has up-to-date technology services in the library, including computers, WiFi, and digital content. As with most libraries, Red Bank has experienced a need for greater bandwidth (particularly WiFi). The introduction of a maker/creator space could also impact the library's bandwidth needs. Further, libraries are becoming the community space to explore new technologies. In order to fully meet this need the library will have to plan for expanded technology support as well as increased expertise among

staff. Offering expanded training services that support new and existing services is considered to be a growing need by the Library staff.

Interagency cooperation
As a means of economically increasing its outreach to the community, the Library partners with a number of important organizations in addition to schools and churches. Cross promotion and partnering takes place with other community organizations including Project Write Now, Monmouth County Arts Council, Monmouth County Literacy Volunteers, Citizens for a Diverse and Open Society, Borough of Red Bank Parks and Recreation and Red Bank's Human Relations Advisory Committee.

Planning Tools and Results

Two established planning tools were utilized to provide information that could serve as building blocks in the development of the strategic plan. A public survey was developed and administered in order to discern attitudes toward the Library and patterns of use of its services. Additionally, the planning committee participated in a SWOT analysis to help formulate strategy that would position the Library appropriately with respect to its environment. The outcomes of these two tools provide support for the Challenges, Goals and Actions included in this strategic plan.

Survey
The committee developed a survey to ask library users and nonusers about their library experiences and their views of the Library. Two surveys were provided – one in English, to which 393 people responded, and one in Spanish, to which 14 people responded.[1] Out of the total number of respondents, 28 percent used the Library daily or weekly, 36 percent attended monthly, and 29 percent rarely visited it. Women use the library more frequently than men. Approximately 74 percent of respondents were female in all categories of library usage – daily or weekly, monthly, or rarely. Further, respondents between 55 and 74 years of age, followed by those 35 to 54 years of age, were represented most frequently in all categories of library usage. However, the disparity between these two age groups was greatest in the daily or weekly category, and least in the rarely category. Finally, whereas Red Bank residents utilized the Library far more frequently than non-residents, the disparity between residents and non-residents was least (though still substantial) in the daily or weekly category.

When asked about operating hours, only 30% of respondents indicated the current hours met their needs. Additional evening (particularly among those who rarely use the library) and Saturday hours are of most interest to respondents when asked about when they would like to see hours increased. Weekday evenings and weekend afternoons are also the most convenient times to attend programs.

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[1] Special note of thanks to Maria Ramirez and Alex Rios who translated our survey into Spanish

Regardless of how often they visit the library, most respondents do so to borrow library materials and utilize the facility to read. Fiction and nonfiction books are the most popular items, although DVDs and children's books are borrowed regularly as well. By far, lending physical materials is considered the most important service provided by the Library.

Offering services and programs for young people also are judged to be important Library activities. Children's and young adult services are deemed to be among the most important, regardless of how frequently the respondent uses the library. Further, story time programs were the most frequently attended programs.

Survey respondents indicated less use of library computers and more use of their own technology in the library. However, use of computers is greater among those who attend the library most often, particularly for job searches. Respondents value library staff expertise in reference/research and readers advisory while also rating all programs provided by the library very highly. Respondents also indicated a low awareness of, but high interest in, electronic databases and digital collections. This is clearly an area where these services can benefit from stronger marketing and outreach efforts.

Respondents, not surprisingly, identified parking as an issue, but also praised the library's location. Several commented that the library should seek to do more with the library grounds. The Committee recommends exploring possible uses of the Library's outside areas.

Satisfaction with the library and its services is very high. More than 90 percent of the respondents indicated that the library was a welcoming and safe place with a readily available staff to provide assistance. Further, the more they were satisfied with the programs that it provides, the greater the frequency with which respondents used the library. Of the 78 respondents who expressed a preference for other types of programs not currently offered by the Library, classes that would improve communication with the Hispanic community, primarily by teaching the Spanish language, received the greatest interest (14 percent). Nevertheless, there were questions about the limited collection. For example, shortcomings in the collection were named by 13 percent of the 54 respondents who did not use the Library at all. There were also some calls for closer cooperation/merger with the Monmouth County Library System, an idea which has been proven to be incompatible with our current budget and needs.

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis identifies the Library's strengths and weaknesses (internal factors), and opportunities and threats (external factors). The elements of the SWOT analysis so identified can serve as the basis for defining performance goals and their attendant relevant actions that are appropriate for addressing the major challenges confronting the Library. For example, the Library's strengths could be the basis for expanding its activities to take advantage of perceived growth opportunities in its environment and/or overcoming perceived threats. The Library's weaknesses might

indicate areas that require the infusion of new resources to pursue perceived opportunities and/or a defensive plan to make the organization less vulnerable to an external threat.

Strengths	Weaknesses
1) Quality programming	1) Insufficient/irregular hours
2) Dedicated and expert staff	2) Insufficient funds
3) Children's services	3) Staff coverage (3 floors)
4) Friends of the Library	4) Insufficient parking
5) Library Foundation	5) Deed-imposed limitations on revenue-producing activities
6) Historic collection on the Red Bank community	6) Lack of social media plan
7) Collection	

Opportunities	Threats
1) Eisner Foundation Gift	1) Instability of 1/3 funding formula
2) Diversity of community	2) Rising materials cost
3) Community and cultural partnerships	3) Neighboring property development
4) Outside space	4) Rising staff costs
5) Support of Borough Council	5) Poor public understanding of what a library brings to a community
	6) Low public awareness of library services

Core Competencies

Ideally, one or more identifiable strengths will rise to the level of a core competence. A core competence is a unique resource of an organization that provides it with a viable advantage over its competitors. A core competence significantly contributes to the perceived customer benefits derived from the organization's products and services. It is a resource that is difficult to imitate and, therefore, is not readily available from competitors. Importantly, a core competence serves as the basis for entering a variety of different product and/or service markets. Strategic plans should reflect these core competencies

Results from the survey indicate that local history programs rank 4th out of 15 Library programs in terms of popularity. Further, the survey also suggests that local history services were most popular among respondents who rarely used the library. This finding is consistent with the idea that these services might constitute a special attraction among those people who don't ordinarily use the Library but cannot obtain historical information elsewhere. In validation of this information, the Library sponsored Facebook page "Historic Red Bank" has over 1000 members who live all over the country. The interest

in the Library's history collection and digitized resources continues to grow. New materials are purchased or donated each month, expanding the breadth of information housed on the Library's second floor.

The Library is also in the unique position to build its relationship with the local schools to increase the role the Library can play in providing resources for all Red Bank schools. Partnering with the teachers from each school and developing a cross pollination program which brings students to the library not just during the summer but all year is an initiative that cannot be duplicated by neighboring libraries. The specific curriculums shared by the Red Bank schools naturally make the Library the sole destination for certain information. This area must be expanded and exploited. Students should not be inclined to find their material at neighboring libraries.

Combining the expertise and access to local history with the curriculum of the local schools would provide students with a unique opportunity to use source material, research in depth a subject that is close to home, and provide a benefit to the community as a whole as the creation of published material on aspects of local history are forthcoming from the student's initiatives. The tourist center would have a never depleted collection of historic facts and findings created by students. Walking tours through historic districts, Red Bank old and new fun facts, and architectural or artistic development of neighborhoods are just a few possible projects that would be a boon to Red Banks already expanding role as a destination place on the Jersey Shore.

Finally - one of the very things that make the Library "the most remarkable place in town" is the view that is available to all visitors, patrons and community members at any time. Expanding the availability to include the use of the outdoor space, welcoming people to the back yard, providing reading materials, perhaps a concession stand and programs will encourage a fun filled atmosphere that libraries usually do not publicize because libraries are "quiet spaces". Take the fun outside and encourage visitors to play and sing and recite and enjoy. This is what makes the Library unique.

<div align="center">Meeting the Challenges</div>

The future of the Library is dependent upon its ability to address current challenges to provide access to information resources and services needed by the community, to create value for the community, and to secure predictable funding for its operations. Successfully dealing with each of these challenges requires the attainment of several pertinent performance goals (PG). In turn, goal attainment is made probable by means of proper implementation of one or more specific relevant actions.

As suggested above, the elements of the SWOT analysis are the basis for the PGs. To make this relationship clear, the statement of each PG is linked to the code for one or more appropriate SWOT elements. The PGs are stated in a form that is expected to be suitable throughout the life of the plan and that will provide measurable ways to mark progress toward meeting the challenge. The relevant actions should be revisited annually and updated/revised as necessary.

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Challenge: Provide access to the information resources and services needed by the community to support life, learning, work, and play.

PG: Establish the Library as an outstanding resource for local history information. (S6)

Relevant actions include:

- Expand outreach efforts so that the Oral History program is accessible to all Red Bank students.
- Develop a plan to expose residents to the Library's vast local history collection through exhibits and lectures.
- Digitize holdings to expand access to collection.
- Reopen NJ History Room and establish regular hours.

PG: Expand access to information resources and library services. (W1)

Relevant actions include:

- Assess ability to restore/expand hours based on community needs and feasibility.
- Simplify schedule to create a sense of consistency in hours.
- Redesign 24 Hour Library page of the website.
- Evaluate signage used within the Library as well as add directional signage throughout Red Bank.
- Assess the current use of space and how well it meets the community's needs.
- Develop a plan to address space allocation if indicated.

PG: Study ways to utilize the grounds of the Library for best use of available spaces. (O4, W5)

Relevant actions include:

- Scrutinize the Library deed for limitations on the use of facilities.
- Evaluate permanent renovations of backyard to allow for expanded use.
- Encourage activities that utilize the waterfront property.
- Evaluate potential changes to front yard uses.

PG: Ensure that during all RBPL hours the staffing level is appropriate and the staff on duty is well-trained in all Library-provided services and technologies. (W3) (S2)

Relevant actions include:

- Develop and implement staff technology competencies and assure that all staff are provided with training required to meet these competencies.
- Develop an overall staffing plan that provides part time staff for unexpected shortfalls in staffing so Library space is always open. (190 staff hours a week to open the Library currently).

PG: Continue to serve the educational, literacy and recreational reading needs of all adults, children and young adults through collections, both print and digital. (S7)
Relevant actions include:
- Review the collection development budget and establish annual collection priorities. Year one will include addressing the need for more Spanish language materials for children and young adults.
- Expand the scope of services offered to children, preteens and teens.
- Expand outreach to support the school year curriculum and academic needs of children and young adults through partnerships with teachers and school administrators.
- Investigate providing expanded collections (tools, cake pans, seeds, etc.).

PG: The Library will increase the public's awareness and ability to take advantage of digital services. (T6)
Relevant actions include:
- Identify specific marketing/promotion strategies to increase the public's awareness of digital services.
- Expand training opportunities for users of digital media.

Challenge: Create value for the community by engaging and empowering the constituents that is served.

PG: Improve overall communication with the community. (T5, T6)
Relevant actions include:
- Develop a communication outreach plan that increases awareness of all library services and incorporates the use of technology and social media.
- Identify specific outreach strategies to local realtors/businesses to make them aware of the many library services of specific interest to their companies.

- Develop a strategy for publicizing the strategic plan specifically for council, community members, RiverCenter, donors etc.

PG: Enhance the regular programming designed to engage the educational and cultural interests of Red Bank residents. (S1)(O3)

Relevant actions include:
- Investigate the feasibility of providing new programming on topics identified by survey respondents.
- Foster community driven programming.
- Work with Friends of Library to institute a museum pass program.
- Establish guidelines or criteria for determining the success of a program or series.
- Continue developing relationships with local visual and performing arts organizations with the purpose of co-sponsoring or collaborating on programs.
- Engage Red Bank's children and youth in STEAM education through innovative programming and learning opportunities (ex. Intro to Coding or Maker Programs).

PG: Encourage the community to meet at the library (W5)(O3)

Relevant actions include:
- Review policies for use of meeting room space to facilitate increased use.
- Hold regular "town hall" type meetings at the library on specific topics.
- Arrange meet and greet evenings that bring diverse populations together to find out about library events

PG: Develop and support partnerships with schools, borough, community organizations, houses of worship and area businesses. (O3)

Relevant actions include:
- Reach out to local businesses to develop complementary marketing/discount programs that would encourage library use and bring customers to businesses.
- Investigate the feasibility of starting a "One Community" reads /Big Read program, determine the goals and partners for such a program.
- Begin a Lunch and Learn series.

PG: Develop a more formalized volunteer program. (W3)
  Relevant actions include:
- Identify current volunteer needs and design a more comprehensive program of volunteer activities.
- Empower volunteers to own projects or places in the library.

Challenge: The Board of Trustees will ensure the Library is well supported to meet the needs of current and future community residents.

PG: Develop a coordinated fund raising strategy maximizing the Library's many partnerships, the Foundation and the Library Friends. (S4, S5)
  Relevant actions include:
- Establish and encourage naming opportunities.
- Continue annual appeal.
- Create a unified development strategy led by a skilled development professional.
- Increase corporate support for library.

PG: Focus funding on the Library's Core Competencies (S6)(O1)
- Expand hours in Local History Room.
- Add tools such as Ancestry.com that encourage onsite use of resources.
- Encourage the creation of a Historical Society and sponsor a History Day each year.
- Sponsor history competitions: examples of possible competitions historic tours, photos and "past and present" overlay books
- Sponsor a history intern from the high school honors history program.
- Focus some donors on the local school curriculum that the library is supporting throughout the year.
- Expand the collection to specifically meet the needs of local schools

PG: Research and identify potential grant opportunities. (W2)

PG: Continue to build upon the strong relationship with the municipality to leverage all library resources. (O5)

PG: Establish a Technology Team to ensure that the library has the technology and equipment to support library trends.(S2)(O5)

Annual Strategic Plan Evaluation

- Strategic Planning Committee – review and revise priorities each year.
- Provide annual report to Board of Trustees on activities accomplished and identify priorities for next year.
    - Achievement of performance goals may be assessed with existing and emerging statistics on library use such as number of library card holders, annual physical and virtual library visits, impact on physical and digital circulation and programming attendance.
- Conduct a patron survey.
    - Content of the survey will be based on the items used in the survey on which this report is based. Such a design will facilitate estimation of changes that result from the implementation of the current strategic plan.
- Commence review and implementation of actions corresponding to goals identified as priorities.
- Review and Reassign tasks to Library staff and other Committee members so that all actions have ownership.
- Repeat each year.