

Montague Libraries Strategic Planning Community Conversation

April 14, 2022 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM

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The Montague Libraries include the Carnegie Public Library (main branch), the Montague Center Library, and the Millers Falls Library.

Describe the library in one word

Attendees were asked to introduce themselves, their relationship to the library, and describe the library in one word:

- Community
- Community resource
- Accessible resource
- Amazing resource - Community
- Community
- Social life
- Big mission, little space
- Nurturing

Community Visioning

Attendees were led through a brief mindfulness exercise and then asked to complete the following statement.

I dream of a Montague where...

- “we share resources”
- “All the books I's like are automatically reserved for me without any effort on my part.”
- “I can continue to walk to services, particularly the library”
- “I feel safe having my kids walk downtown Millers Falls alone. Where there are people around, visiting, shopping, eating, learning together.”
- “I can spend time at the library”
- “the libraries are hubs of each village, with healthy, climate resilient buildings that serve EVERYONE.”
- “THERE ARE PLACES FOR PEOPLE TO GATHER, TO THINK AND CREATE AND DISCUSS”
- “everything is equitable: housing, food, and opportunity...where community is valued and where we can live, work and play together.”
- “libraries are more accessible — hours and days”

- “there is a robust small business community, people from all walks of life are out on the streets greeting one another, there are many community events, and adults and children are connected to others in their community. And it is a community renowned for its kindness and gentleness for all who are here, visiting or citizens”

**These statements may be helpful to develop the library’s vision statement.*

Facilitated Discussion

Strengths

What do you like the most about the Carnegie Library or the branch libraries?

(What are the libraries’ strengths? What services or resources do you use most often?)

- Great place to come together - amazing resource to get whatever book
- Walk to it - node of community - meet neighbors and friends - new people (Montague Center)
- Place to connect and make friends - “valuable” - saved thousands of dollars in curriculum materials for homeschooling - love all
- Helped meet people and understand people
- Love Montague Center Library - tie to the past - Homey resources
- great love of libraries - CWMARS system great - staff friendly and helpful nice –
- community hub
- Opportunity for programs - to engage with literature - Storytime, music and movement - younger kids in community have access to other things than screens (Carnegie)
- The staff knows what I like
- Books, staff - all great, friendly, comfortable, welcome, proximity to Village (Montague Center)
- CWMARs - amazing luxury
- Proximity - center of downtown, close to a lot of resources - central - reasonable place to get things printed out - access to internet - echoing CWMARS - how to borrow books for Kindle (Carnegie Library)
- Echoing what others said - staff is great - infrequent user - but just as friendly as if there all the time - always want to come back - tent with children’s activity - delightful to hear kids singing and playing games – proximity of generations (Carnegie)
- Love the staff, know my children by name, kids were on youth advisory, use Carnegie the most - as a home school parents - look for multimedia - find reference to rare, weird resources - Scott finds anything in 5 minutes - rest of the staff does the same - staff is resourceful, helpful, really outstanding, a lifeline
- Miller’s Falls - tiny library, great combo with CWMARS - can request anything but feel like still homey library - place to hang out afterschool - haven in community
- Thinking about Montague as a whole - have so many distinct villages - very centrally locate library within walking distance - library is the one place to not buy anything - for each village to have place like that for a book, program, resources, to see neighbors - tremendously valuable – welcoming staff

What new services or resources has the library offered during the pandemic that you would like to see continued? What do you miss that may have been discontinued?

- Bag of activities for kids was really nice
- Other stuff to check out like puzzles – bring one/take one
- Like the new bookcase by the front doors at the Carnegie - Craftsman set of tools - could lead to a lot of new and innovative stuff

Barriers

What are your biggest barriers to using either the main library or the branch libraries or using them more – if any? Have you experienced any barriers to using online services? (e-books, website, etc.)

- Hard to spend time at the Carnegie Library - busy school schedule - want to spend time at library looking at books, but no comfortable way to do that - space is so small - looking for a chair or two to sit down or a couple of desks for homework
- One of the things that I find very limiting is the hours - two smaller libraries are outstanding but only open 2 days a week - so helpful - so determined – even Carnegie only open at 1 PM - more hours would help moms, families, home schoolers.
- Hours are the issue - limited days, limited hours, budget constraint - can be a hub - could be all hours, all people, more diversity - if don't know about CWMAR, don't know what you can access
- Challenge: people are used to instant gratification, extended hours/access important - way to pick up books after hours
- Hours has inhibited me, Carnegie hours: Could there be some flex with when libraries are open? - one open when other isn't? Interested in more hours on weekend. Libraries are all open at the same time. More hours and varied hours
- Hours and availability of time. Town does not have the resources to fund it. Libraries don't have space.

Barriers you may have observed:

Do you think there are any particular groups in Montague that face barriers to using the Library? If yes, which groups and what are the barriers?

- Limited easy readers in Spanish - more resources for multicultural people in community
- Wonder about Spanish speakers - How accessible the library is for Spanish speakers?
- Friends with mobility issues - entrance to the libraries awkward – wheel chair accessibility in stacks (Carnegie)
- Air quality - issues for staff and users - buildings need to be healthy and resilient - weather will be worse - infrastructure - physical challenges and quality of the space - building not accessible
- Hours - biggest accessibility - wheel chair accessibility is challenging - both Carnegie and Montague Center have rooms upstairs that are inaccessible

Customer Service

How would you describe the customer service you receive at the libraries?

Participants were asked to describe customer service in 1-2 words in the chat box:

- Customer service is a 15 on a scale of 1-10!
- responsive, friendly!
- friendly and helpful
- responsive
- caring and attentive
- friendly, above and beyond
- friendly and helpful
- problem solver, friendly
- Friendly and knowledgeable
- actively works with the questioner to shape the question and find the answer together
- very skilled

Additional comments:

- Millers Falls started a food pantry
- Years ago, staff would drive books to houses
- Carnegie also great
- What does the staff think they need to sustain that level of service as library grows?- flag that...diversity of training re: e-resource

Building

What is noteworthy or special about the library's buildings? What, if anything, would you like to see changed or improved in the library buildings or facilities? (signage, study rooms, social areas, programming spaces, etc.)

Please specify which library.

- Architecture of Carnegie - beautiful - part of the reason we should not build new library - but needs some improvements to study space, general being around space - one table with a lot of chairs only - accessibility could be improved - upstairs space is not accessible - upstairs spaces are underutilized - would be great to read or study up there
- Carnegie - beauty of building - privilege to go up to second floor only recently - such a big beautiful space, lots of potential, unfortunate that it's inaccessible - would like to see outdoor space - picnic tables - bring library outdoors - seating area outside
- Some limitations structurally with second floor in Carnegie – structurally floor can only support limited weight – could be used for study space or small groups
- Have used Carnegie Library extensively for home schoolers - difficult space to use - noisy - another thing that's sad, museum used to be in town, when museum closed archives at library - no one can see archives – incredible - things 100 years old, really interesting
- Interested in a used book room
- Accessibility
- Building is special - hope is that if we had a new library - we would have some other purpose for that building - would like to see more tables and chairs -for studying - comfy chairs and couches, relaxing spaces, spaces for people who want to be around people, but not interacting with them

- Meeting rooms are important for open groups, a modern library is a community center

Collections

What is noteworthy or special about the library's collections? What, if anything, would you like to see changed or improved in collections? - both hard copy and digital

- Remarkably diverse (Montague Center)
- People love their DVDs - but took away a lot of book space
- Could CWMAR do a cooperative buying effort so movies are preserved through libraries?
- Carnegie Library collection is very diverse - has expanded - more books from different perspectives – different races, genders – greatly appreciate queer –Carnegie Library could benefit from a slightly bigger YA section - feels like a lot of adult books and kids' books - from 5-8th grad - not much to read
- Documentaries- discovered documentaries on Overdrive –
- Is there a way to have resources that people know about? Overdrive and Libby?
- Related to earlier comment about instant gratification, Libby is instant gratification.
- Grateful for testing manuals
- Appreciate manuals how to learn different languages – though would like more diversity for multicultural families

The facilitator asked participants to share in the chat how they find out about what's going on:

- Wowbrary
- love emails directly from the library
- staff
- Website
- At the library itself -- staff, flyers
- I generally hear about new things from Angela at our YACcers meetings; she's very informative!
- but I don't tend to read the wowbrary emails, oops
- News paper
- fliers, website
- Email list that is easy to sign up for
- yes, an email list would be great!

(There was a wide variety of responses. Facilitator shared that it's a challenge for libraries to publicize in all these spaces.)

Technology

What is noteworthy or special about the library's technology? What, if anything, would you like to see changed or improved in technology? – both hard tech and virtual and personal assistance/classes

Noteworthy/special:

- As a staff - public computers are so slow - painful
- Carnegie Library slow - no privacy - life line not extra
- A lot of people who live downtown need access to computers to access resources

Change/ areas for improvement:

- CWMARS website is confusing - doesn't make sense
- Haven't been using local library recently - have been using university library as a student – haven't used computers at Carnegie in a while – interested in technology workshops

Programs/classes

What is noteworthy or special about the library's programs? What programs would you like to see offered by your libraries?

- Programs – how to use email, accessing apps like bank info, mobile phones, technology
- Music and movement important part of kids growing up - way for community to get together – gave us a little bit of Spanish - got us through hard times together - exceptional
- Programs that Carnegie Library does - programs for little kids - Storytime, music and movement - Valentines Party - great opportunity to volunteer, learn how to work with kids, continue Youth Advisory Committee
- Would love to see more art programs
- Art program sparked something - years ago - afterschool alliance great program-
- Space to gather for particular activities - community space
- Knitting group

Additional Ideas were shared in the Padlet Brainstorm activity:

<https://padlet.com/MassLibSystem/Montague>

Partnership

What do you see as the most valuable partnerships for library community engagement in the future? To benefit or transform the community?

- Wish we had a stronger connection with the schools to increase library use by 4-8th graders
- Not sure on current partnerships, future - Brick House, community space for youth
- Lifepath (healthy living workshops), partner with current resources in community offering workshops to expand library programs
- Family Engagement Coordinator (Stacey Langknecht) for Montague Schools (she would love to help with that) after 4th grade some loss – it's been a really challenging year for teachers and everyone
- Stacey also runs the family/parent program at Brick House...always happy to talk about more ties. Caitlin and Angela are always helpful.
- if you think about the library as a community space for programs, then there is an infinite space for partnerships... gathering space...

Final Question/ Magic wand: *(everyone required to respond)*

If you could change or add just one thing to the Montague libraries what would that be?

- More study space to hang out and read
- Hours

- Community spaces for meetings, clubs, teens - wish Montague space could be more active and accessible
- More hours
- Hours that make the community space more accessible
- Hours for two smaller branches and space
- Hours and availability - L space – Terry Pratchett readers – interdimensional library
- More funding - more active program - bring people to library in the hours that we have

Padlet Brainstorm

<https://padlet.com/MassLibSystem/Montague>

- Participants were asked to think of 3-5 ideas for resources, programs, or services that you would like to see at the library in the future.
- Next participants selected their top 5.
- Then, participants added comments on all the ideas shared.

Responses are available on the link above and also have been downloaded as a PDF and spreadsheet.

Wrap Up Round:

Participant to share a final thought or reflection or something that stood out about our discussion:

- Great to hear from everybody – we are all on the same page
- Feeling – feeling hopeful – feeling that there’s this much support for the library – that there may be more funding down the road
- It’s hard to wrap my head around people in New England wanting everything within walking distance
- Feel optimistic – we are mainly on the same page – or often – like support for library and also wishing for improvements
- It feels like connecting. Being in this space and brainstorming with people in the community. Feel connected – like I’m not being unrealistic. Grateful for the opportunity to be a part of it.
- Glad to feel more connected with other patrons. Money is the big elephant in the room. If we are all on the same page, find creative ways.
- Encouraged – need to keep the branches – would have liked more diverse participation - very white, very privilege. Vision of walkability – if we can have an orangutan in L-Space, we can walk to our libraries.
- Feeling very encouraged – excited about the energy in the community – worry about Miller’s Falls – hope that the momentum in support of Carnegie and Montague Center can carry over to Miller’s Falls. New things Caitlin is doing – library is a good place to work and be at now.

Report documented by Michelle Eberle, Consultant, Massachusetts Library System
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