

VESPASIAN WARNER PUBLIC LIBRARY DISTRICT 2019-2021 STRATEGIC PLAN



August 2019

WELCOME

Our beloved library has changed greatly in its 118-year-life: from a two-room private library serving a hundred subscribers to today's public library district serving more than 12,000 patrons with an annual circulation of 124,000.

Our services have also expanded over the past century from simply providing access to print materials, to adding audio-visual items, digital content, educational programs, internet access, and more. As our patrons needs have changed and diversified, so have our offerings.

Our facilities and services are ever evolving, but our core values have remained constant: connecting people, sharing knowledge, and enabling life-long learning. We are passionate about enriching our community and making our patrons' lives better.

With these values in mind, we are proud to present our *2019-2021 Strategic Plan*. This plan captures the important values, priorities, and mission of our institution while remaining flexible enough to allow the library to adapt quickly to our patrons' ever changing and diverse needs.

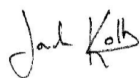
The plan is a culmination of a year-long process facilitated by a strategic planning consultant. The planning process included input from the community through, surveys, focus groups, engagement with staff, and the library board.

Strategic planning is an ongoing process for any vibrant institution, and we anticipate adjusting and updating this plan before our next formal plan is released for 2022-2024: please engage with our staff and board to share your ideas and needs as we continue to build the Vespasian Warner Public Library District to serve our community as it enters the third decade of the 21st century.

Sincerely,



Bobbi Perryman
Executive Director



Jonah Kolb
President, Board of Trustees

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

VWPLD is deeply rooted in DeWitt County and provides a significant historic presence for library district residents and beyond. The legacy of the members of the Moore and Warner families is widely known, and many institutions have benefitted from their generosity. The physical library is unique, a building within a building, which features Arts and Crafts architecture and decorative arts. The library houses many historic documents and items and serves as the home of the DeWitt County local history collection.

As most public library districts are funded primarily from property tax revenues, VWPLD is in a unique and difficult position. DeWitt County is home to an Exelon nuclear power plant—an economic driver for the entire county, supplying robust property tax revenues and jobs. The power plant has had a tumultuous history with the use nuclear power in decline and now with the certainty of an eventual closure. Recently, the Illinois General Assembly took action to help the plant stay open for another decade. This action, while helpful, does allow time to plan and execute planning for the sustainability of the library and to consider potential scenarios that will envision its future. Another factor is a declining population and a higher-than-average poverty rate. It brings reality to a long shared concern – how will the library survive and move forward with an uncertain funding future, given a significant reduction of tax revenues?

PROCESS SUMMARY

Assessments:

Strategic planning begins with assessments and document review. Library use statistics and critical library documents were reviewed and discussed. Focus groups were held with the library board of trustees, library staff and library users. A survey was distributed to library users, both online and in print. The results of these processes was analyzed and provided to the library board members for their discernment.

The staff focus groups revealed strong support for the library and significant concern for the future of the library. Most notably, there was a level of concern about deferred maintenance, the length of time needed for processing DVDs and the future retirements of key library staff. The board focus group was more pragmatic, with deep concerns about funding, the capacity to provide excellent service to the library users and concerns about the sustainability of the library itself. The board understands the purpose and place of the library as a valued institution capable of change and as a community center. The community focus groups were loyal and staunch library supporters who have concerns about the library future, but pointed to many positives, especially the space, historic value, children's collection, the library staff, the DVD collection and the great customer service. To complete the assessment process, the board walked through a SCOAR, a processing technique that examines strengths, challenges, opportunities, aspirations and results. This process, unlike the commonly used SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), opens up thinking around strengths and outcomes with a healthy dose of practicality and serves as a robust lead into an environmental exam. The board also considered the mission statement and updated it to reflect the current operational environment. A vision statement was developed and accepted by the board. Both mission and vision will guide the planning and direction of the library. Finally, strategic directions were identified and validated during this process.

VWPLD Strategic Plan Consultant: Christine Westerlund

OUR MISSION

Our Mission: The Vespasian Warner Public Library District strives to be a welcoming place that meets the diverse needs of its communities through high-quality resources and supportive services to stimulate and facilitate creativity, curiosity and learning.

OUR VISION

Connecting People

Connecting patrons to our services, connecting with other community groups when goals align, and connecting patrons to other groups in the community that can help them meet their needs when the library can't.

Sharing Knowledge

Serving as a central hub in the community as a repository for knowledge, especially in the field of local history. A wide range of information is shared in a variety of formats to meet patron needs.

Enabling Life-Long Learning

Facilitating the development of life-long learners in the community through programming, active participation, and engagement with all patrons.



STRATEGIC PLAN DIAGRAM



STRATEGIC AREAS OF FOCUS

Partners & Outreach

The library will expand its reach in the community and create a heightened profile in the district. The library will become a priority destination.

Preserving History

The library will maintain its role as an expert and destination for the preservation of local history and archive items.

Discovery & Skills

The library will create and facilitate effective, targeted, and inclusive programs, collections, and services, all in a welcoming environment.

LIBRARY CONSIDERATIONS

In order to meet the needs of the community and make progress in each Strategic Area of Focus, library staff members and the board of trustees must consider their actions from multiple perspectives. The tools below will help to guide the library in a positive direction.

Fiscal Responsibility

The library will take care to be a good steward of its funding. A strong finance policy will guide the decision-making process for all major projects.

Data Driven Decisions

The library will be equipped for robust data collection and analysis to make informed decisions about all aspects of library functions.

Library Space Use

The library will consider all possibilities for efficient and effective space use, including new configurations for materials, furniture, and equipment.

Technology

The library will keep abreast of library technology trends and implement new initiatives in order to better serve the community.

Well-Trained Staff

The library will ensure that policies and procedures are implemented to support professional development, ongoing staff evaluations, and succession planning for current lead staff members.

Flexibility & Innovation

The library will promptly adapt to societal and technological changes in order to stay relevant in an ever-changing world.

PARTNERS & OUTREACH

THE LIBRARY WILL EXPAND ITS REACH IN THE COMMUNITY AND CREATE A HEIGHTENED PROFILE IN THE DISTRICT. THE LIBRARY WILL BECOME A PRIORITY DESTINATION.

This strategic area includes the library being proactive in bringing the community together and establishing the building, contents, staff, and services as valuable and irreplaceable assets. It will be a place to conduct business, engage with others, and participate in recreational and educational activities.

KEY OBJECTIVES & METRICS OF SUCCESS

- Increased public perception as a priority destination in the community as measured by:
 - Total number of library visitors
 - Results of program evaluation surveys
 - Total number of new patrons, including total number of library card holders.
- Increased community collaboration as measured by:
 - Total number of partner-based initiatives completed
 - Total number of community referrals given to the public
 - Total funding received through local grants, donations, and gifts
- Increased public usage of library common spaces as measured by:
 - Total number of public room reservations
 - Total attendance in public room rentals
 - Types of gatherings conducted at the library

PRESERVING HISTORY

THE LIBRARY WILL MAINTAIN ITS ROLE AS AN EXPERT AND DESTINATION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF LOCAL HISTORY AND ARCHIVE ITEMS.

This strategic area includes the preservation, restoration, digitization, and display of historically significant artifacts and documents. Effort in this area has the potential to bring in an audience the library has not interacted with previously. The preservation of local history has the potential to use shared experiences to strengthen the community's bond.

KEY OBJECTIVES & METRICS OF SUCCESS

- Increased public access to one-of-a-kind historical resources as measured by:
 - Total number of available archive items
 - Total number of available digital archive files
 - Total number of archive items available through library-affiliated displays
- Increased public usage of the library's local history collection and equipment as measured by:
 - Total number of archive questions and requests answered
 - Total number of in-person and digital archive item views
 - Memory Lab and equipment usage statistics
- Increased awareness of the library as a holder of local knowledge and history as measured by:
 - Insights from social media and marketing efforts
 - Results of program evaluation surveys
 - Total number of local history items donated to the library

DISCOVERY & SKILLS

THE LIBRARY WILL CREATE AND FACILITATE EFFECTIVE, TARGETED, AND INCLUSIVE PROGRAMS, COLLECTIONS, AND SERVICES, ALL IN A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT.

This strategic area includes opportunities for engagement through programs, services, and library materials. Patrons are walking through the library doors with the intent to discover something new, and everyone in the community can benefit from added knowledge and skills. The library will offer quality resources for free information, education, and entertainment.

KEY OBJECTIVES & METRICS OF SUCCESS

- Increased patron knowledge delivered through programs as measured by:
 - Results of program evaluation surveys
 - Total number of programs offered
 - Types of programs offered at the library
- Increased patron knowledge delivered through services as measured by:
 - Rate of successfully answered reference and reader advisory questions
 - Total number of one-on-one trainings provided
 - Total number of services offered to the public, including usage data
- Increased diversification of circulating collections as measured by:
 - Circulation statistics
 - Total number of new items offered to the public
 - Collection development statistics to track collection diversity