

New Lebanon Library Strategic Plan

Vision “The New Lebanon Library will continue to grow as a welcoming center for our community that supports discovery, creativity, interaction and the exploration of new pathways to life-long learning.

Mission

“The New Lebanon Library promotes lifelong learning by making accessible the widest array of library services and robust collections using a variety of formats and information technologies. It also serves as a cultural venue for the community by contributing to individual literacy, education, and entertainment in a friendly and inclusive environment.”

Overall New Lebanon Library Goals

The New Lebanon Library is committed to providing a wide range of library services to the community, including opportunities for reading, lifelong learning, and personal and professional enrichment for people of all ages; a welcoming environment with well-organized and up-to-date collections, and friendly service under the leadership of our Director, a professional librarian.

The Library offers access to a wide variety of free programs for all ages, a diverse collection, and serves as a cultural center for the town of New Lebanon. We provide an extensive range of information and materials using traditional and innovative methods to promote, encourage and support the diverse needs and recreational interests of our community. We serve as a gateway by offering access to emerging technologies and information resources on a global scale. As a member of the Mid-Hudson (MH) library system our patrons can utilize the resources of libraries in five counties, Columbia, Dutchess, Putnam, Greene and Ulster County.

The Library also provides a friendly space for the community which encourages curiosity, free inquiry and lifelong learning. Our meeting room enables interaction with fellow community members in both public and private events. The full-time Library Director, Library Staff and Trustees are dedicated to providing the best service to all patrons.

Description of New Lebanon, NY

Originally formed from the town of Canaan in 1818, New Lebanon has a long and fascinating history. The native people taught the early settlers the healing properties of the spring water and the diverse assortment of wild herbs that grow in swamps fed by this water. From the late 18th to early 20th century, it was home to the Mount Lebanon Shaker Society and a vibrant Shaker community which produced, among other products, herbal medicines and seeds. The Shaker buildings that remain now house the Darrow School and a Sufi retreat center. The Tilden Company, founded in 1824, manufactured herbal extracts that were sold nationally and became the nation's first pharmaceutical company. The area of the town called Lebanon Springs became a popular spa in the late 19th and early 20th century due its spring water and featured large hotels with guests from around the world. The water was also piped by aqueducts and conduits to other parts of the town. According to some sources, the first free public library was established here in 1804. Throughout its history, the people of New Lebanon have valued the rural, agricultural character of their community and continue to protect and promote agricultural activities and the rural character of the town. A recently completed survey by the town (June 2020) revealed 10 features that respondents desired (their prioritization is yet to be completed). Among these features is the preservation of rural, scenic and historic character and natural resources, sustainable economic development including tourism, and a vibrant town center with access to basic services. The Library has many books and other resources of local historical interest.

The town of New Lebanon is located in the northeast corner of Columbia County, New York. The northern town line is the border of Rensselaer County, New York, and the east town line is the border of Berkshire County, Massachusetts. It is approximately 30 mi. southeast of Albany, NY and 140 mi. north of New York City. The estimated population of 2,221 in 2019 (Census Bureau) is a 9.5% decrease from 2000 with a density of about 62/mi². Demographically the population is aging with approximately 30% over 60 and only 18% under 20. While the median income of families is approximately \$50,000, 16% of those under 18 live below the poverty line. Racially the town's population is overwhelmingly white (96%) with very small percentages of other races.

Overview of Library's History and Services

The New Lebanon Library is an association library operating as an independent not-for-profit corporation chartered by the state and subject to oversight by the State education Department. Established in 1912, the New Lebanon Library draws patrons from a wide area, including the neighboring NY towns of Stephentown, Canaan, Chatham as well as Hancock,

MA. Financial support is provided locally by the town of New Lebanon with tax levy funds under Chapter 414 of New York State Education law, most recently approved by the voters in 2007. Additional support comes from private donations, special fund-raising events and grants. The Town of New Lebanon's most recent town master plan calls for continued support of the library as an important town institution.

Among the services provided, in addition to traditional and on-line offerings of books and periodicals, are computer use with trained assistance, virtual reality hardware and software with training for older adults and even ukuleles (with instruction of course). Programming includes story hours, lectures, reading support for children, craft and literary exploration programs for children and adults, MH book talks, a variety of programs for seniors, a professionally-led book group, and monthly (MH) musical concerts (free of charge) and wellness programs (e.g. yoga). The library also serves as a community gathering space and has a newer addition/reading room that can serve a variety of library sponsored and other community functions. As a result of "community conversations" (discussed below) the library has shared funding support for local agriculture as well.

Description of Planning Process

The strategic planning process was initiated by direction of the Board of Trustees in 2019 with a discussion of the need for an overall strategic plan and the formation of a planning committee. Prior to this, planning was done on an annual basis by the Board and the full-time library director. Input for this plan came from members of the committee, trustees, library staff and members of the New Lebanon community through individual discussions and a series of group meetings as part of a "community conversations" project conducted by the library to assess the aspirations and concerns of the community. Participants expressed the desire for a more vibrant community with a "town center". Also it was widely felt that, with the loss of the newspaper and a decrease in church-related activity, the library could serve as neutral source of community information.

Description of Services and Patron Utilization

The library's collection includes almost 50,000 books (print and electronic) in addition to digital on-line services for other print, audio and video materials. The library also sponsors a wide variety of programs for children (and a renovated children's area), young adults and adults, including summer reading, early literacy for preschool to kindergarten, digital literacy, and diversity and cultural awareness. Library activities include: crafts, artist and author talks, yoga, story time, live music performances, informative talks on a variety of subjects from art to

health to cooking, movies, music instruction, virtual reality experience, gaming and other creative opportunities for all ages. Programs are offered both on and off-site in collaboration with community organizations, including local schools and summer camps. The general trend is for increased participation in these collaborative (MH) programs. The library offers computer literacy classes and provides resources for jobseekers on its website. The library also serves as a centralized location for community information and uses its own internal advertising to spread the information further.

Even as the population of the Town of New Lebanon has decreased, utilization of library resources has increased. In the years 2015-2019, we have averaged 13,617 patron visits with an increase of 26% in 2019 over 2018 with the most visits during the summer months. Juvenile circulation has over the same 5 year period averaged 6551 with an increase of 28% in 2019 over 2018. Electronic circulation (avg. 1362) similarly showed an increase (33%) as did total circulation up 15% (22,797) in 2019 over 2018.

Goals and Objectives

- **For the facility**

Library patrons will continue to utilize clean, well-maintained, comfortable and safe library facilities with **improved access** for those with disabilities.

A prioritized facility maintenance/improvement and facility technology plan will be developed and reviewed on an annual basis.

The library will assess its energy efficiency and implement energy saving improvements while it improves its lighting resources.

The utilization of space will be evaluated to provide additional opportunity for privacy, quiet study, and small group interaction.

- **For library personnel and volunteers** and board members

The library will maintain and train appropriate staff levels including volunteers to carry out its mission.

This includes providing opportunities for continuing professional education in performance of library duties in a (MH) continually changing environment and communication and public relations skills.

Periodic evaluation and rewarding will lead to better retention of staff.

Staff will meet for regularly scheduled team meetings to keep up-to-date and have in-person training for library procedures

There will be an annual review of library by-laws and board member responsibilities to keep up-to-date with state requirements.

- **For technology**

Library patrons will have access to computer, software and virtual reality resources and continued offerings in digital literacy. Library staff and volunteers will provide assistance and training with these technologies.

The Library will maintain and upgrade existing computer resources including software for library management as needed.

The Library will maintain and evaluate the utilization of on-line internet resources (e.g. books, periodicals and videos) available to patrons.

- **For collection**

Continue to maintain and make additions to the print and electronic collections that meet the interests of our varied patrons.

Provide adequate access to popular items and new formats and technologies.

Introduce young readers to new, exciting, and both classic and popular works.

- **For community relations**

Maintain liaison with town board.

Build a clearinghouse function for community information.

Continue to inform the community about the library through the library's newsletter, a section in the town's newsletter, the library's website and calendar of events.

Support and promote other community services (e.g. first responders, other volunteer groups, such as Meals on Wheels and the North-east Food Bank distribution program).

Establish an on-going mechanism for community comments on the functions of the library (on website or in-house suggestion box)

- **For programs and services**

Continue to offer programs and services that have been demonstrated to meet the needs of patrons' goals as determined by community conversations and data on participation in existing programs and utilization of existing services.

Investigate the potential for offering college-credit courses on-line at the library.

Investigate methods for increasing access for elders in a broadly dispersed community with poor internet access.

Maintain and expand services for hearing and visually impaired patrons.

Encourage more use by young adults and reach out to current non-users.

Explore additional opportunities for more collaborative and off-site programming.

Encourage more program participation, engaging with participants and ultimately foster mini communities within each program.

- **For funding**

Develop a plan to secure reliable financial support from the taxpayers of New Lebanon for continuation and improvement of services put forth in this plan.

Continue fund-raising activities through special events, and cultivate prospective donor support through a variety of gift mechanisms, including a prioritization of the use of these funds.

Establish a Friends group.

Pursue grants from public sources and private foundations to support specific programs and resources.

Meet with state government representatives to promote support for library funding state-wide regularly as both part of Advocacy Day activities (minimum 2-3 Trustees in attendance) and for any special upcoming events and COVID-19 restrictions.

Communicate Strategic Plan to Community

Announce the availability of the strategic plan in the library and town newsletters and post plan on-line with printed copies available at the library.

Invite public comment on library's website.

Process of Evaluation

Progress toward accomplishing goals will be evaluated by the Board of Trustees and included as part of the Annual Report.

Staff will regularly evaluate program usage/feedback using Project Outcome.

Public comments gathered on the website will be included in the evaluation.

Periodic revision of the plan's goals may be required as a result of annual reviews of feedback and community needs.