



Chelsea District Library

Strategic Plan 2020-2022

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Ann Arbor, Michigan

Chelsea District Library: Background

The mission of the Chelsea District Library (CDL) is to engage, inspire, and equip through evolving services and resources. In existence since 1959, the Library is now entering its third decade as a *district library* serving the City of Chelsea, Lyndon and Sylvan Townships, as well as portions of Dexter and Lima Townships.

Much has been accomplished over the past three years, since the last strategic plan, including the following building improvements:

- Separate youth, teen, and adult spaces in the interest of safety and security;
- New security cameras;
- Increased building accessibility;
- A new large meeting room and clearly defined youth and teen spaces;
- Upgraded Reading Garden including seating, Fairy Garden, and open-air programming; and
- A portable wall system for hosting national touring exhibits such as *American Farmer* and *Apron Strings: Ties to the Past*.

In addition to building improvements, the Library worked to increase its reflection of the community and create a sense of shared ownership. The newsletter began featuring artwork by local students and adults, stories highlighting the community (e.g., Jiffy Mix, women's suffrage in Washtenaw County, Waterloo Recreation Area), and a Township Talk column. The Library began featuring collections and displays by members of the community (e.g., Fordite, fishing lures, buttons, family photos and memorabilia, *Artful Aging* artwork) and hosted the much-loved *American Farmer* exhibit to celebrate the community's farming heritage.

The Library also took services and programs out into the community through engagement efforts such as:

- Walk to School Wednesdays;
- Programming at St. Louis Center in Sylvan Township;
- TecXpo and Rockin' on the Farm in Lima Township;
- Installation of the StoryBook Trail at Baker Preserve;
- Programming at Chelsea Senior Center including Direct Dialoging and Place That Face; and
- Bringing poet/memoirist/youth and community activist Luis Rodriguez, singer songwriter Paul Burch, opera soprano Joy Jan Jones, musician John E. Lewis,

and the celebrated authors of Authors in Chelsea to classrooms throughout the community.

Reflecting values of diversity and inclusion, the Library held staff development sessions on working with visitors with intellectual and developmental disabilities and those on the autism spectrum. Meanwhile, the staff welcomed an intern with Asperger's Syndrome onto the team. The Library continued to celebrate diversity through exhibits like *Beautifully Wrapped* and *What We Carried* and brought multicultural artists to the community including Jacopo Giacobuzzi, Georgy Gusev, Grant-Lee Phillips, Min Jin Lee, Luis Rodriguez, Peter Ho Davies, Derek Palacio, Michael Eric Dyson, Ada Limon, and Anissa Gray.

Once named the "Best Small Library in America" by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the CDL is constantly striving to evolve its collections and services to meet the changing needs and interests of the entire Library district. With that in mind, Library staff and the Board of Trustees have committed to building upon recent successes with a new strategic vision of facilitating access to Library services for everyone in the service district.

Facilitating Access

What exactly does the Library provide access too? Hint, it's much more than books! Defining access for the CDL begins with defining the purpose of the Library which one supporter described as "a gateway to information and entertainment for the entire community." With that purpose in mind, access includes:

Physical Access

Once patrons enter the library, they are exposed to all it has to offer. Physical access recognizes the value of bringing people into a shared space where they can participate in programs, try out tools, test new technologies, learn about the history of Chelsea, connect with others, and of course find plenty of books. Physical access also includes accommodation of various abilities, disabilities, and needs.

Remote Access

Given the size and largely rural nature of the district, as well as the needs of patrons with limited mobility, remote access is a priority. The Library offers many services online where patrons can download books, access digital magazines, print out tax forms, learn about local history, find community information, and sign up for home delivery.

Access to Shared Resources

Access to services, programs, technology, spaces, and collections should benefit all Library patrons regardless of financial status. The CDL is prudent with financial resources in order to bring excellent value through shared resources that strengthen the entire community.

Access to the World

The CDL works to bring the world to the district's doorstep by featuring diverse local, national, and international artists, performers, and authors who bring enriching cultural opportunities to the local community.

Mutual Access through Partnerships

Chelsea and the surrounding townships are enriched by a strong web of interconnected community organizations, services, and businesses. Partnerships strengthen access to all that the CDL and partner organizations have to offer.

Feeling Welcome

The Chelsea District Library rounds out its definition of “access” with one more quality – feeling welcome – and strives to create an environment, programs, and services, where everyone feels a sense of community and belonging.

The Library currently serves more than 15,000 area residents, with over 12,000 individual visits to the Library each month. While a community survey employed during the previous strategic planning effort indicated exceptional satisfaction with the Library experience – over 98% described the overall Library experience as outstanding (84%) or satisfactory (14%) – the Library recognizes that there may be gaps in service that have yet to be identified.

The Library is committed to facilitating access for all because library access is about more than just books. Access to the Library means access to knowledge, resources, business opportunities, cultural experiences, and connections to each other.

This new strategic plan will guide the Library to better understand and address gaps in access, use what is learned to inform programming, and help it progress toward its goal: facilitating access for all to the wealth of wonderful shared community resources available through the Chelsea District Library!

The Library is grateful for the sound financial foundation provided by a community-supported millage, which is further enhanced by revenue resulting from the dedicated work of the non-profit group Friends of the Chelsea District Library.

Process Undertaken

Chelsea District Library Director Lori Coryell engaged Bridgeport Consulting beginning in the late summer of 2019. Over the following seven months, Bridgeport consultants Kerry Sheldon and Anica Madeo:

1. Facilitated a half-day **all-staff strategic planning retreat** to develop strategies addressing the theme of “facilitating access;”
2. **Synthesized staff input and background data** to produce a curated set of potential strategic initiatives;
3. Facilitated a **management staff working session** to prioritize early ideas and develop a draft framework of strategic initiatives and goals;
4. Facilitated a **half-day retreat with the Board of Trustees** to test and validate the early concepts that emerged from staff and to inform the stakeholder engagement approach;
5. Facilitated two **focus groups** with CDL supporters, including library volunteers and former board members, to gather feedback on the draft plan;
6. Facilitated a CDL **all-staff meeting** to gather additional feedback for refinement of the strategic plan.

This planning process included less community stakeholder engagement than might be expected. This was an intentional decision as the plan itself developed to include the collection of in-depth stakeholder input via a thorough needs assessment and gap analysis. The Library looks forward to gaining a deeper, and more nuanced, understanding of community needs throughout the coming years.

Chelsea District Library: Vision, Mission, and Values

The Chelsea District Library's vision, mission, and core values provided inspiration to this strategic planning process and continue to act as guideposts to both the strategic decisions and the daily work of the Library.

Vision

A vibrant hub bringing together and enriching all communities

Mission

To engage, inspire, and equip through evolving services and resources

Values

- Equal, uncensored access
- High quality resources
- A safe, secure environment for all library visitors
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Fiscal integrity and accountability
- Free exchange of ideas
- Inclusion and respect
- High ethical and professional standards
- Superior customer service

Strategic Initiatives and Goals

Initiative 1: Expand Awareness of Services

1.1 Strengthen communication of the Library’s values and services through a brand strategy refresh.

The Library’s brand strategy underwent an extensive overhaul in recent years including a new logo, tagline, colors, and website. The brand strategy *refresh* – which may include enhancement of the web presence, logo, and signage – will focus on promoting Library services to people who are not currently accessing them.

1.2 Increase awareness of services by offering “welcome kits” to new patrons.

The Library is committed to helping patrons feel welcome using library services and participating in events. “Welcome kits” will be designed to introduce new patrons to the range of materials and services that are available, including physical accessibility supports. Kits will include a collection of clear and concise hard copy paper materials that can be easily updated to highlight new services. Additional online resources, such as a brief welcome video, could augment paper resources.

1.3 Introduce new patrons to the Library space by offering physical and virtual orientations.

While patrons can engage the Library through off-site programs, visits to the Library space offer a unique opportunity to encounter new services and connect with other community members. Orientations could take the form of library tours, virtual tours, and open house events, all designed to connect patrons with Library staff and services as well as the broader community.

1.4 Increase Board of Trustees visibility and participation in Library services.

The seven-member, appointed Board of Trustees serves a critical role in advocating for their constituencies which vary in geographic and demographic characteristics. Increasing the visibility and participation of Board members in library events and programs, as well as outreach to the City and townships, will help expand awareness of services and strengthen the connection between the Library and the five municipalities it serves.

Initiative 2: Strengthen Intentional Approach to Inclusion

2.1 Consider adoption of fine-free policies to remove financial barriers to Library access.

Across the country, many libraries are adopting fine-free policies to remove a significant barrier to library use for people with limited financial means. In fact, the American Library Association calls fines “a form of social inequity” and has called on libraries to eliminate fines which penalize the very patrons who might benefit the most from library resources. This developing trend has shown promising results with libraries reporting an unprecedented return of delinquent books and renewal of library cards. As a first step, the CDL is examining lessons learned by other libraries including need, incentive structure, and impact. Then, if indicated, the Library will develop a plan for implementing fine-free policies that support access to materials and services regardless of financial status.

2.2 Simplify card registration and renewal.

Library cards are a gateway to Library services. Simplifying the registration and renewal process will increase access for all library users. Potential approaches include online or automatic renewal, removing annual driver’s license checks, and increasing reciprocal agreements with surrounding area libraries.

2.3 Perform a service gap analysis to better understand community needs and address gaps in service.

Improving library accessibility is contingent on understanding what gaps exist between community needs and current library services. To this end, the CDL plans to contract with outside experts – and partner with local community agencies – to perform a *service gap analysis*. The analysis will identify the needs of the community in regard to quality, quantity, and type of services as well as knowledge of existing services. With that input, the Library will develop a plan to address gaps and ensure alignment of services. The gap analysis will take into account the socioeconomic, geographic, and racial/ethnic make-up of the community, as well as other contributors to diversity, with the goal of equitable and inclusive access for all.

2.4 Increase “browsability” of collections to make the Library more user-friendly.

In recent years, many libraries have examined the usability of their collections and worked to improve patrons’ ability to browse and find books and other

materials. Approaches vary, and there is no one-size-fits all solution, but many libraries have found that topical section labels, much like one would find in a bookstore, simplify browsing for patrons. The CDL will explore potential shelving options based on the experiences of other libraries and develop a transition plan and timeline to support the needs of both patrons and library staff.

2.5 Explore shift to alternate hours to better meet patrons’ needs and preferences.

The Library staff and board have observed patron’s needs and preferences for a shift in hours of operation. In response, the CDL will explore possible changes to the current hours of operation.

Initiative 3: Address Geographic and Mobility Challenges

3.1 Bring the Library into the community with “mobile library” services.

Recounting fond memories of the “book mobiles” of the past, many Library staff, board members, and stakeholders expressed widespread enthusiasm for the development of “mobile library” services. Given the largely rural geographical spread of the Library’s service district, “mobile library” services provide an opportunity to bring the Library closer to where people live and congregate. Creative suggestions for the “mobile library” include offering mobile hot spots, a tool “petting zoo,” on-the-spot technology assistance, and pop-up programs.

3.2 Provide mobile card drives to better reach new patrons throughout the service district.

As the gateway to accessing Library service, Library cards should be easy to acquire. Mobile card drives will be designed to reach new patrons across the service district and may be combined with the “mobile library” or held on their own. Potential outreach sites could include local sporting events, farmer’s markets, and locations throughout the townships.

3.3 Promote online tools for expanding digital literacy.

Patrons can currently access in-person technology assistance in the Library building. For those who are geographically isolated or face mobility challenges, easy-to-use online resources for digital literacy (such as understanding how to use web browsers, search engines, and email) are a great asset. The Library is

well-positioned to test and curate existing resources and offer them to the community in an easy-to-navigate online collection.

Initiative 4: Close the Gap in Digital Literacy and Access to Technology

4.1 Develop a digital literacy strategy.

From smartphones to tablets to laptops, digital tools proliferate across society. New apps and services are constantly being developed and many people find it hard to stay up to date with the ever-changing array of technological tools. The digital literacy strategy will be designed to support patrons in learning to use digital tools (such as understanding web browsers, search engines, and email, as well as getting started with new smartphones and tablets). It will also focus on helping patrons assess accuracy and reliability of data sources. Special focus will be paid to communities with new broadband services.

4.2 Develop a digital tools promotion strategy.

Complementing the digital literacy strategy, digital tools promotion will focus on strengthening awareness of new and emerging technologies (such as e-books, 3D printers, and virtual reality equipment) and exploring the feasibility of adding new offerings to the Library's resources.

4.3 Continue to advocate for expanded high-speed internet access throughout the Library service area.

The Library will continue to be a leader in the efforts to expand broadband access by partnering with area schools and agencies to advocate for student internet access beyond school hours, offering hotspots for checkout, and continuing to support township efforts to increase high-speed internet access.