



Chelsea District Library

Strategic Plan 2017-2019

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Chelsea District Library: Background

Established in 1998 when the Village of Chelsea joined with Dexter, Lima, Lyndon, and Sylvan Townships to enter into a District Library Agreement, the Chelsea District Library (CDL) offers a vast array of valued materials and services to the community. Physically located in a historic three-story building in downtown Chelsea that was significantly renovated and expanded in 2006, the Library continuously engages in community outreach to raise the visibility of library offerings, and to stay connected with residents and visitors of the district.

This connectedness has yielded results. The Library Journal named CDL “Best Small Library in America,” an honor accompanied by a \$15,000 award sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. While certainly proud of this distinction, the Library’s Board of Trustees and staff remain mindful of the imperative not to rest on this achievement, but rather to maintain relevance, in part by continuing to evolve collections and services at pace with constituents’ changing needs and interests.

For example, the Library has responded to the lack of comprehensive broadband Internet service, especially in the more rural areas of the district, via a multi-pronged approach that includes:

- Offering wireless “hot spots” with unlimited data capacity for patrons to check out;
- Installing wireless hot spots at community locations such as township halls; and
- Advocating at the local and state level for the expansion of broadband service.

Alternative solutions to the need for more broadband accessibility are beginning to gather momentum, and the Library intends to contribute to these. Simultaneously, stakeholders have expressed strong interest in other non-traditional items such as tools and equipment offered for checkout, which the Library is positioned to pursue.

In sum, this new strategic plan intentionally reflects the Chelsea District Library’s commitment to discovering creative ways of serving district residents while maintaining strong fiscal prudence and fiduciary oversight. 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. Nonetheless, this strategic plan proposes a goal around continuing to diversify the revenue sources that support the Library, in order to increase the institution’s long-term resilience and responsiveness long into the future.

This resilience and responsiveness are key underpinnings of the Library's approach to community engagement moving forward, as well. The Library's current reach is substantial, with over 9,000 cardholders residing within district boundaries and an additional 600+ cardholders residing outside the district. This figure represents greater than 45% of the service district's total population,¹ and no major gaps are apparent with regard to the geographic distribution of cardholders throughout the service district.

That said, when one considers the cardholder population within the City of Chelsea in contrast with the four townships represented within the district, a slight yet observable trend has emerged in the past decade: the number of cardholders within the more densely populated urban area has increased, while the cardholder population in more sparsely populated rural areas has plateaued or even slightly declined. Especially in light of the approaching millage renewal scheduled for 2019, the Library recognizes the importance of thoughtful engagement with the district's rural residents in order to better understand their needs and tailor programs, collections, and services accordingly.

The Library has a considerable foundation on which to build in this regard. One of the more salient characteristics of this strategic planning process has been the degree of participation demonstrated by stakeholders. The seven-member, appointed Board of Trustees works together with collegiality and good humor, and readily volunteered to lead the charge in speaking with community leaders, elected officials, and constituents at community events. The new Library Director, hired earlier this year, was welcomed with unanimous support from the Board, staff, and community members who participated in the search. The full complement of CDL staff contributed to the development of this strategic plan with thoughtfulness and enthusiasm. Participation from all of these groups was remarkable, and was further complemented by the enormous response generated via a community-wide survey deployed as part of the planning process. Of the 358 responses received, over 98% described the overall Library experience as outstanding (84%) or satisfactory (14%).

This strategic plan seeks to find a balance between the achievable and the ambitious. Implicit in all the initiatives and goals set forth within is the desire to continue living up to the community's high expectations for an institution that is nimble and collaborative, accessible and responsive to all constituents. Welcome to the Chelsea District Library!

¹ The 2010 US Census measured the total population of all five jurisdictions as 19,896. However, only a portion of Dexter and Lima townships are included in the CDL district.

Process Undertaken

The Chelsea District Library Board of Trustees issued a competitive Request for Proposals that resulted in the engagement of Bridgeport Consulting beginning in the spring of 2016. Over the following six months, Bridgeport consultants Kerry Sheldon and Griffin Reames:

1. Conducted **individual interviews** with each trustee to learn his/her particular interests and aspirations for the strategic plan;
2. Developed, deployed, and synthesized results from a **survey distributed to stakeholders** via online and paper formats in the interest of broadening the field of suggestions and ideas that could inform the strategic plan's contents;
3. Facilitated three **focus groups with area stakeholders**, both by invitation and volunteer participation, to deepen understanding of patron needs and desires;
4. Collected the results from interviews and small-group conversations with **community leaders and elected officials** led by the Board of Trustees;
5. Synthesized **internal data** in order better to understand the demographics of CDL's existing cardholder population;
6. Compared cardholder demographics with **community-level demographic data** as published by the U.S. Census and Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG); and
7. Facilitated a **half-day retreat** with the Board of Trustees and CDL staff both to build a shared understanding of the stakeholder feedback and data synthesis, and begin to refine an emerging framework of initiatives and goals.

Outcomes from the above activities provided a platform for discussion at the September, October, and November 2016 meetings of the Board of Trustees. Associated documentation has been compiled for reference purposes in the Appendices (published separately).

Chelsea District Library: Vision, Mission, and Values

The Chelsea District Library's (CDL's) vision, mission, and core values were refreshed as part of this strategic planning process. The updated statements are as follows:

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
- 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: Facilities, Finance, and Technology

1.1 Realize the highest potential of the Library facility, fully utilizing all existing space to support optimal patron usage and experience.

The Library's current facility has reached maximum capacity as currently configured – though additional space for events, meetings, and programs continues to be in high demand. A first step of revisiting the current layout and programming of the top two floors of the building is proposed, in order to investigate potential alternatives for optimizing patron usage and experience. Then, if indicated, the Library will develop a plan for expanding usage into the lower level. Throughout, the Library will work in close collaboration with the Friends of the Library organization to ensure sufficient space is maintained for the monthly book sale.

1.2 Continue to diversify the Library's revenue sources.

Diversification of revenue sources beyond the existing millage funding could help make the Library more nimble and resilient over the long-term. Suggested means for diversification include targeted grant writing, program-specific fundraising, and/or a measured approach to building the endowment. Due care will be taken to ensure the Library complements, rather than competes with, the efforts and offerings of non-profit agencies in this endeavor.

1.3 Continue to advocate for and support high-speed Internet access throughout the Library service area.

The Library has long been a leader in the efforts to expand broadband access by offering hot spots for checkout, participating in the Washtenaw County Broadband Initiative, and installing permanent hot spots at locations throughout the service area. As local efforts to pursue a potential dedicated millage begin to take shape, the Library will attend carefully to opportunities to serve as a supportive partner, while simultaneously continuing to pursue innovative ways for ensuring the community has access to this type of needed infrastructure.

Initiative 2: Community Engagement

2.1 Increase awareness/visibility of the Library throughout the community.

Survey responses indicate the potential to increase the community's awareness of the Library's full scope of services. A refreshed approach that reflects continued experimentation with both technology-based and traditional communication methods could result in greater visibility and awareness of all that the Library has to offer.

2.2 Conduct regular, meaningful outreach and engagement with residents and representatives of the rural areas of the Library's service district.

SEMCOG data predicts a growth in the population and employment figures for the rural areas of the service area. At the same time, CDL cardholder population in these jurisdictions has plateaued – or, in some cases, even experienced a slight decline in recent years. The Library seeks to reverse this trend, and is mindful that engagement approaches that are successful in more populous jurisdictions will not necessarily translate to more rural areas.

2.3 Strengthen and sustain relationships with schools in our district.

The Library and the Chelsea District School District share strong mission alignment, and the institutions have worked diligently to discover opportunities for collaboration over the years. The Library is eager to welcome the new district superintendent, and deepen the relationship with the district in order to support the public school community. Simultaneously, the Library will continue to support the homeschooling community to make sure all young learners are well-served.

Initiative 3: Programs and Collections

3.1 Enhance the Library's programs, collections, and services to address the needs and interests of teenage patrons.

Survey respondents, focus group participants, and other stakeholders expressed enthusiasm for how well the Library serves children, youth, and families – while also sharing thoughts regarding minor programmatic adjustments that might be of value. Teens, however, were identified as one demographic segment within that broader population that might warrant more attention and focus. The Library has previously programmed a great deal in this area; in addition to current programs for college-bound teens, a renewed approach will reflect lessons learned from previous efforts, and will also be informed by direct engagement with teen patrons to better understand their interests.

3.2 Provide leadership around issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion through our programs, collections, and services.

US Census data illustrate a stark absence of racial and ethnic diversity in CDL's service area when compared to the surrounding region. Survey respondents and focus group participants observed this homogeneity, and were attuned to the value of exposing youth in particular to different cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives. As a non-partisan institution committed to democracy, accessibility, and information sharing, the Library is uniquely positioned to provide leadership in this area. A broad view that takes into account not only racial/ethnic identities, but also socioeconomic, geographic, and other contributors to diversity will provide a useful lens through which the Library evaluates programs, collections, and services in order to live up to this responsibility.

3.3 Expand the Library's collection of non-traditional items.

The Library has begun to expand its collection of non-traditional items, and this effort has been received with much community excitement. Some specific ideas from the survey and focus groups for furthering this work include tools and equipment, scientific instruments such as microscopes and telescopes, musical instruments, and art. Key needs and interests – represented, for example, among the area's farming, artist, wellness, sporting, and crafting communities – will inform the expansion. Partnership opportunities with local organizations will also be pursued to enable a wide variety of offerings to our residents and patrons.

3.4 Collaborate with our community's senior population to create deliberately designed intergenerational programming opportunities.

SEMCOG predicts increases in the senior population within the CDL service district, as well as the nation as a whole. CDL's current work with the senior community, in part through relationships with senior residences and service providers, is perceived as valuable and effective. In addition to current programs, which often are available both to adults and youth, a new emphasis will be placed on purposefully providing programmatic opportunities for younger and older generations to interact and engage in activities that result in mutually beneficial outcomes. New programs will draw on the talents and expertise of all participants, and encourage both young and older people to view one another's contributions through an appreciative lens.