



Strategic Plan

Fiscal Years 2023-2027



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The Board of Trustees of the Conant Public Library unanimously approved and adopted this Strategic Plan at their meeting on June 13, 2022.

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Alexandra Grebinar, Assistant Library Director
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Heide Martin, Trustee
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Betsy Perry, Library Director
Michelle Roy, Community Member
Amanda Sayut, Trustee
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Introduction

The Library's success is largely due to the staff's ability to respond to the community's evolving needs. To this end, we developed a strategic plan to guide our success throughout the next five years. The Plan covers fiscal years 2023-27 and is designed to be flexible. Its ambitious goals will guide the Library as we seek to provide outstanding library services to the community.

Community Description

Sterling, MA is a beautiful small town centrally located in Worcester County. Rich in history, Sterling was originally a farming community. Sterling was incorporated in 1781 and named for William Alexander, Lord Stirling, who served with George Washington in the American Revolution. The town had an early tradition of small manufacturing that included clocks, hats, pottery, and cider. Sterling was the home of Butterick Patterns—a company founded in 1863 by Ebenezer Butterick who created the first-ever graded sewing patterns. It is known as the home of Mary Sawyer, noted in the famous children's rhyme "Mary Had a Little Lamb."

Today, Sterling (pop. 7,985) is primarily a rural-residential town with a growing commercial and industrial base, located in the foothills of Mount Wachusett. Sterling has maintained its village character; has true community spirit; and has residents who invest in the community, volunteer, and pride themselves on the town's history. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the town has a total area of 31.6 square miles, of which 3.42% is water.

According to U.S. Census estimates for 2015-2019, the town of Sterling's population is composed of:

- 96.6% White
- 5.1% Hispanic or Latino
- 1.3% Black or African American
- 1.1% Two or more races
- 0.4% Asian

The median household annual income is \$121,458, which is significantly higher than the state median household annual income of \$81,215. The town is demographically comparable to the state. For example, the under-18-years cohort in Sterling is at 23.2% in the 2019 U.S. Census estimates versus 19.6% for the state. 4.9% of the population of Sterling is in the under-5-years cohort, while the state has 5.2%. Similarly, in the 65-years-and-over cohort estimate, Sterling is at 18.9% while the Commonwealth's is 17%. The median age of Sterling residents is estimated to be at 41.7 years, while the median age for the state is 39.5 years. Approximately 97.5% of Sterling residents ages 25 and older have a high school diploma. About 53% of residents ages 25 and older hold a bachelor's or higher advanced degree.

Library Description

Originally constructed in 1885, the Conant Public Library was named in honor of Elizabeth Ann Conant, daughter of Edwin Conant. Edwin Conant donated a majority of the funds that made building the Sterling Library possible. Subsequent renovations increased the footprint of the library building to 7,800 square feet. The Library is a focal point of downtown Sterling, sitting adjacent to the classic New England-style town common.

The Library is governed by a six member Board of Trustees elected by the residents of Sterling.

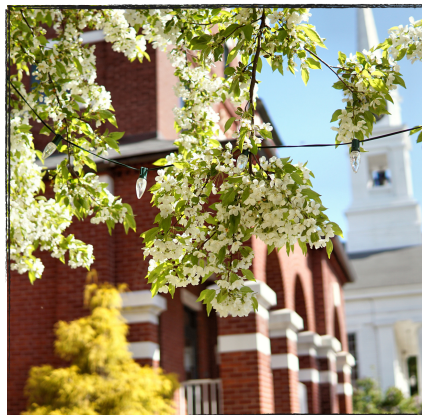
Methodology

In December of 2021, the Library hired strategic planning consultant Barbara Alevras of Sage Consulting Services to guide us through our planning process, facilitate several planning exercises, and oversee the collection and analysis of internal and community feedback.

To begin, we established our planning goals, including being as inclusive, transparent, and objective as possible. We identified specific activities and key community stakeholders we wanted to engage and created a detailed process flowchart to serve as a visual project “roadmap” (see [Appendix A- Strategic Planning Process Flowchart 2021-22](#)).

Over several months, we conducted a series of virtual feedback exercises, including:

- One Community Visioning Exercise (results presented in [Appendix B](#))
- Three Focus Groups (results presented in [Appendix C](#))
- Two Strengths-Opportunities-Aspirations-Results (SOAR) Exercises (results presented in [Appendix D](#))
- One Community Survey (results presented in [Appendix E](#))



Key Learnings

Feedback received during the assessment phase of the planning project offered insights regarding staff and community perceptions of the current Library and expectations for its future. Analyzing the input helped us identify major strengths and challenges and provided numerous creative ideas for how the Library can meet the community's needs going forward. In the wealth of opinions and ideas collected, the Library's greatest strength was consistently identified as the Library's staff, which garnered extremely positive feedback (fantastic, knowledgeable, creative, helpful).

While feedback received was overwhelmingly positive, the most prevalent complaint related to inadequate parking. Requests for an enhanced, expanded parking lot exceeded all other improvement-related responses.

Areas of Focus

During the planning process, hundreds of community members submitted numerous suggestions for improvements and new initiatives. Feedback fell into the following six categories:

- **Collections:** Interest in cultivating a larger, more diverse collection, increasing the available children's books, materials, and resources, and expanding the non-traditional "Library of Things" collection.
- **Facility:** Requests for additional parking and improved parking lot safety greatly exceeded ideas submitted in all other focus areas. Additional popular potential facility improvements included adding meeting rooms, providing more interior and exterior seating, enhancing the Library grounds and landscaping, developing functional exterior space, and improving the configuration of shelving and space.
- **Marketing:** Respondents suggested the Library pursue additional outreach and collaborations as well as improve and increase its messaging.
- **Programs:** Respondents contributed dozens of ideas related to offering more diversity/multicultural-based programs, intergenerational and family-friendly programs, and additional programs for all ages. Additional suggestions touched on desirable program times and numerous specific program ideas.
- **Services:** Interest expressed in convenience-based services, such as curbside pick-up, homebound delivery, and more general outreach/off-site access to Library offerings. Other ideas included enhancing the process to access museum passes, offering tutoring, and providing reading recommendations.
- **Technology:** Respondents expressed interest in more general and specific technology classes, more access to devices/hardware (hotspots, 3D printer, etc.).

Where possible, ideas received were incorporated into the Library's Strategic Plan.

Feedback results are available for review as appendices to this document (see page 8).

Community Vision Statement

The Strategic Planning Advisory Committee drafted 23 vision statements describing their ideal Sterling. These statements are presented in [Appendix B](#).

The Community Vision Statement this group believes the Library can best support and positively impact is:

Sterling provides residents with well-rounded, accessible academic and extracurricular programs and services, including top-notch early childhood, K-12, vocational, and lifelong learning opportunities.

Mission Statement

The Conant Public Library provides equal access to cultural, educational, and technological information and resources to support patrons in their enjoyment of reading and pursuit of lifelong learning.

-Adopted by the Board of Trustees on April 25, 2022

The WordCloud below was created from responses to this question: What are the first 3 words you think of when you think of the Conant Public Library?

These words were provided by the Trustees, Friends of the Library Board members, and focus group participants.



Goals and Objectives

Using the community's feedback and the Library's mission statement as guiding principles, the Library developed an ambitious list of strategic goals and supporting objectives. Pursuing these specific goals and objectives will enable the Library to effectively prioritize and allocate its resources (funds, staff time, etc.) over the next five years.

Goal 1: Access to the Library will be inclusive, valuable, and comfortable.

1. Be a welcoming place with comfortable, usable space and excellent customer service.
2. Expand and improve communications with the community.
3. Anticipate the community's needs and deliver valuable services that meet them.
4. Provide people of all abilities, backgrounds, needs, and interests with access to exemplary programs, services, and materials.

Goal 2: Maintain in-house collections relevant to the community's needs.

1. Sustain, enhance, and promote access to materials provided via the Library's collaborations and connections (e.g., Interlibrary Loan, Massachusetts Library System, CW MARS).
2. Foster the excitement of learning and pursuit of knowledge by making a variety of print, non-traditional, and digital resources available to all users.
3. Ensure quality collection development in all areas of the collection.
4. Continue membership in the CW MARS network.

Goal 3: Offer technology resources to ensure that all community members can access digital information.

1. Support and enhance the Library's new website.
2. Improve and support community members' digital literacy.
3. Use technology to streamline the staff's work.
4. Create an annual technology plan to ensure that in-house computer resources are promptly updated and replaced.



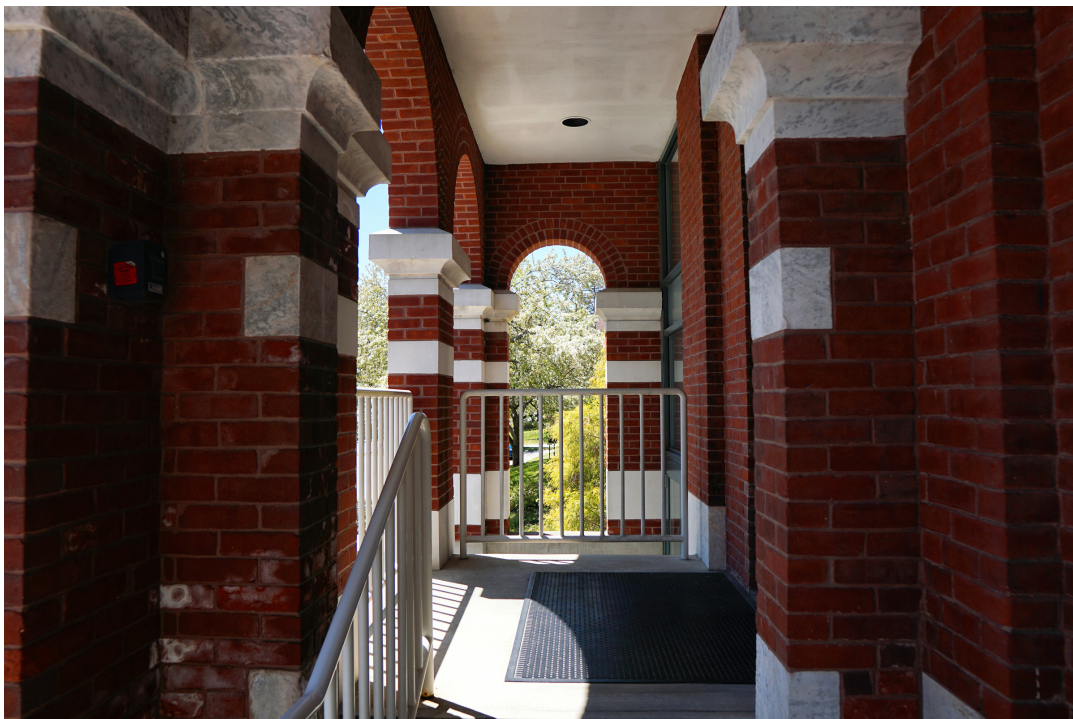
Goals and Objectives continued

Goal 4: Provide resources, opportunities, and programs for learning and education.

1. Cultivate more systemic partnerships with schools and educators to support local schools in providing the best possible education to children.
2. Offer dynamic programs, creative learning opportunities, and free play activities that inspire children to be enthusiastic young readers and critical thinkers.
3. Support teens' social, emotional, and educational development through programming and services that will help them prepare for productive, fulfilling adult lives.
4. Focus on offering programs and resources for adults to participate in lifelong learning, including dynamic book groups, educational performers, and informational lectures.

Goal 5: Develop relationships and services that enrich the community.

1. Develop and strengthen relationships with local community groups, organizations, and businesses.
2. Pursue endeavors and provide resources that support the community and community members' health, safety, and well-being.
3. Deliver programs, materials, and services focused on local history, civic information, and natural resources.



Measuring and Communicating Progress

To ensure steady progress towards achieving the Strategic Plan’s goals, the Library Director will review the progress made towards achieving the Strategic Plan’s goals and objectives monthly, including identifying completed Action Plan tasks. The Director will share the Strategic Plan’s review results with staff at regularly scheduled goal meetings.

Monthly, the Library Director will report to the Library’s Board of Trustees on progress made towards achieving the Strategic Plan’s goals and objectives. In addition, the Director will include strategic plan performance highlights from the calendar year in the annual Town Report.

To ensure convenient access, the Strategic Plan will be available on the Library’s website.

Acknowledgements

During the strategic planning initiative’s extended term, hundreds of people contributed countless hours and significant amounts of feedback to help the Conant Library develop its Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2023–2027. The Library appreciates the valuable input provided by the staff, Board of Trustees, Strategic Planning Advisory Committee, and Friends of the Library Board. Credit for all of the beautiful photographs belongs to staff member Leah Brooks.

We are especially grateful for the time, feedback, and support received from the Sterling community. We acknowledge everyone who contributed in even the smallest way to preparing this Plan.

Appendices

Appendix A - [Strategic Planning Process Flowchart 2021-22](#)

Appendix B - [Community Vision Statements 2022](#)

Appendix C - [Focus Group Summary Report 2022](#)

Appendix D - [SOAR Summary](#)

Appendix E - [Community Survey Results Report](#)

