CONANT PUBLIC LIBRARY
COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS
SUMMARY REPORT 2022

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS = 14

- **Focus Group #1** (3/7/22 6-7:30pm) **= 4**
- **Focus Group #2** (3/10/22 1-2:30pm) **= 5**
- **Focus Group #3** (3/16/22 6-7:30pm) **= 5**

1. WHAT IS THE VERY FIRST WORD YOU THINK OF WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THE LIBRARY?

- Books
- Community
- Convenient
- Free
- Friendly (4)
- Fun (3)
- Inviting
- Kids
- Kid-Friendly
- Neighborhood
- Peaceful
- Sterling

2. WHICH LIBRARY RESOURCES OR MATERIALS DO YOU USE MOST FREQUENTLY?

MOST FREQUENTLY USED:

Collections (19)
- **Books (15):** Children's picture books (4) || Kids' books (2) | Print and digital (5) || Adult books || Cookbooks || Fiction/Nonfiction || Neurodiversity-friendly books || Old/New releases ||
- **Misc. (4):** DVDs (2) || Kids' games || Kids' toys

Technology (8):
- **Interlibrary Loans/Delivery (6):** CW MARS (4) || ILL (2)
- **Applications (2):** Libby (2) || OverDrive, especially the magazines

Misc. (3):
- **Management and Operations - Staff:** Use staff as a resource for selecting and highlighting potential books to read
- **Programs:** Table crafts
- **Services:** Museum Passes

LEAST FREQUENTLY USED:
- Ancestry subscription
- Bestsellers
- Magazines
- Physical newspapers
- Telescope

3. HOW CAN THE LIBRARY IMPROVE ITS PROGRAMS AND SERVICES?

LIBRARY SHOULD START OR EXPAND:

Collections (5)
- **Library of Things (3):** Lend video games || Grow Library of Things to Include Technology Items (gaming systems) || STEM toys
- Offer more copies of eBooks/eAudiobooks
- Ensure that accessible formats of materials are available

Programs - Children's (6)
- **Book Clubs (2):** Book clubs || Would like to see a kids' classic book group
- **Improve Schedule (2):** Offer programs for school-age kids outside of homeschool child hours || Offer school-age children's activities on weekends to accommodate working parents
- Hand sewing, learning skills, and crafting classes for kids
- Increase the capacity for children's programs. Increase the number of children's programs and the number of children accommodated in each program.

Technology (3)
- **Online Resources (2):** Expand ILL to college networks to provide access to academic libraries' offerings || Add Hoopla and Kanopy services
- 3-D printer

Misc. (2):
- **Facility:** Offer a sensory-friendly room (quiet space, dim lights, alternative seating)
- **Marketing:** Reach out to seniors and people with disabilities to assist them with accessing materials, such as books on tape

COMMENTS:
- **Schedule (3):** 25 years ago, there were no evening programs || The Library should accommodate working families' schedules || Library is geared to a community of people who don't have full-time jobs
- Construction paper crafts just become trash at home. Offer better crafts.
- There are a lot of good current programs

4. LOOKING FORWARD, WHAT PROGRAMS DO YOU THINK THE COMMUNITY WILL NEED AND VALUE THE MOST OVER THE NEXT 5 YEARS?

IDEAS:
Collections - Periodicals (2): Increase newspaper availability in an electronic format || More subscriptions to trusted news sources

Marketing (2):
- Raise awareness of the availability of journals/newspapers at the Library and on the website
- Partner with different organizations in town

Programs (8):

- **Tweens/Teens (4):** Resume workshop and college application help for teens || Life skills classes for teens (balancing a checkbook, babysitting certification) || Foreign language discussion groups for teens/tweens || Coding for teens/tweens
- More wellness programs like the current yoga and meditation programs
- Current event-related programs with expert speakers
- Local authors
- Offer more adult programs at night

Services (2):

- 25 cents per copy is outrageous. Copy fees should be reduced.
- Offer delivery service for children whose parents can't/won't take them to the Library.

Misc. (2):

- Enhance accessibility
- Support LGBTQ+

COMMENTS:
- Currently attending kids' programs, adult book groups, and a cookbook club
- Education of the public is important.

5. ## HOW CAN THE LIBRARY'S PHYSICAL SPACE BE IMPROVED?

IF WE COULD CHANGE ONE THING:
- **Exterior (7):** Offer outside seating (2) || Create functional outdoor space (2) || Improve/increase parking (2) || Make the outside more attractive (e.g., add plantings)
- **Accessibility (4):** Improve the lift (2) || Improve wheelchair accessibility || Basement is difficult to navigate and find materials (improve physical access and signage)
- **Children's Area (4):** Increase the size of the children's play area (2) ||Offer different toys || Offer sensory play options ||Offer more adult seating in the kids' area and fewer tables for kids
- **Aesthetics/Interior Design: (2):** The bathroom upstairs could be nicer || Enhance the entryway. Turn it into a welcoming space of learning
- **DVD Section (2):** The DVD section is cramped || Why are the DVDs right where you walk enter? It makes it feel like a video store.
- **Spaces/Niches (2):** Add more gathering spaces || Offer more public meeting spaces (e.g., clubs)
- **Misc. (1):** Can hear people on their cell phones. Should maintain quiet areas and/or offer private places for people to use their cell phones (3)

ACCESSIBILITY FEEDBACK/IDEAS:
- Organizing children's books by genre would make it easier for kids to find books.
- There are a lot of stairs.

- A participant wondered if the aisles in the kids' area are wide enough for wheelchairs.
- The door into the children's room is very heavy.
- The book drop location is awkward.
- Adult fiction is tucked away downstairs, and there's not usually staff down there.

COMMENTS:
- It's a beautiful building with lots of light. It's easy to find what you're looking for.
- One participant said the wall color in the kids' room is off-putting, but another person really likes it.
- The staff are fantastic—very friendly.

6. WHAT TWO WORDS WOULD YOU USE TO DESCRIBE THE LIBRARIANS WHO ASSIST YOU?

- Approachable (5)
- Caring
- Competent (3)
- Engaged (3)
- Friendly (11)
- Helpful (7)
- Kind (2)
- Knowledgeable (2)
- Willing

COMMENTS:
- Very comfortable asking the staff for help. (7)
- The staff remembers patrons' names and preferences.
- Likes that staff gets to know patrons as individuals and their preferences.
- Librarians always engage with the participant's kids.
- Staff always goes the extra mile, especially during COVID.
- The staff is great. I wouldn't know which staff members are professional librarians versus paraprofessionals.
- Appreciates the high level of customer service

7. WHICH OF THE LIBRARY'S TECHNOLOGY OR DIGITAL RESOURCES DO YOU USE EITHER ON-SITE OR VIA THE LIBRARY'S WEBSITE?

DIGITAL RESOURCES USED/ACCESSED:
- Accesses CW MARS account (4)
- Uses OverDrive/Libby applications (5)
- Receives email notices (2)
- Registers for programs online (2)
- Reads Consumer Reports online
- Visits the Library's website
- Conducts catalog searches on the website
- Uses the Minuteman system because it has more resources
- Pre-COVID, used the Library's computers in the Library

DON'T USE TECH/DIGITAL RESOURCES BECAUSE: Don't need them (4)

WEBSITE FEEDBACK (ALL HAVE VISITED THE WEBSITE):

- Uses the catalog to order books (3)
- **Outdated (2):** Thinks it's out of date || Online catalog search function has an antiquated interface
- Finds event information haphazardly ("opportunistic discovery")
- Gets eBooks and audiobooks
- Uses research resources via MBLC
- Reserves museum passes
- Reviews the program schedule
- Several participants were unaware of language learning resources (not sure what that is)

8. WHAT TECHNOLOGY DO YOU THINK THE LIBRARY SHOULD FOCUS ON OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

FOCUS ON:

- **Technology Instruction (7):** Social media use for children (2) || Machine learning || Password management seminar/help || Teaching code to people of all ages || Classes on how to use Adobe creative suite || Privacy workshops
- **Add Resources/Services (6):** Foreign language resources || Streaming video service || Reference materials available online (e.g., Chilton's) || Provide access to Adobe Creative Suite|| Present thematic/topical lists in the catalog || Pro-lo-quo, an icon system that non-verbal people can use to communicate
- **Add Devices to Collection (2):** 3-D printer || Cricut maker
- **Offer Technology Support for Seniors (2):** Conduct outreach via Zoom or at the senior center to help people with phones/iPads || Engage senior citizens with Library resources
- **Misc. (2):** Offer a Makerspace || Communicate/promote offerings via a monthly e-newsletter

COMMENT: One participant wants old books, not new technology.

9. ARE THERE ANY BARRIERS TO SERVICE—THINGS THAT IMPEDE YOUR ABILITY TO RECEIVE THE SERVICE YOU WANT OR NEED FROM THE LIBRARY

BARRIERS:

- **Insufficient/Inconvenient Hours (6):** Not open on Fridays (2) || Friday off is counterintuitive. It should be two days off in a row or open 6 days in a row. Saturday should be longer. || Want more weekend hours || More hours on Saturday || Add Sunday hours || Hours are primarily day-based. It's challenging for people who work to go to the Library.
- **Inadequate Catalog Search Function (2):** The catalog search interface is cumbersome. You can't search multiple consortiums simultaneously in the catalog or Libby. || Catalog is lacking. Would like the Commonwealth Catalog to be more accessible
- **Museum Passes:** There should be an easier way to access and return museum passes. For example, extend the return timeline or enable people to print the pass at home.

- Would like the Library to have a suggestion box and then share responses with everyone (e.g., post them).

COMMENTS:
- Impressed with the high level of service provided during the pandemic.
- Appreciates that the Library isn't closed two days in a row.
- One participant doesn't think there are barriers to service. They use this Library because it's open later than Clinton's library. Plus, they really like being able to register for programs online.

10. HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO HAVE A GOOD LIBRARY IN OUR COMMUNITY?

COMMENTS:
- **Very Important (8):** Irreplaceable || Hugely important || A necessity || Very Important. It seems central to a community || Life-altering || Super important || The Library is the center of the community. || Gotta have one.
- A library saves you money. (3)
- It's important to get kids to enjoy reading and have fun doing it. (2)
- It's the primary source of social networking for parents. (2)
- Provides the community with important resources.
- It's a place to go to see a friendly face.
- Teaches children to appreciate learning and literature

COMPARED TO OTHER TOWNS' LIBRARIES:
- The space/play area is small compared to Leominster Public Library's.
- The feeling of community is great at Conant Public Library—better than at other towns' libraries.

11. WHAT ISSUES NOW FACING THE TOWN DO YOU THINK MAY IMPACT THE LIBRARY?

- **Finances/Resource Challenges (2):** If budget issues arise, self-checkout might be an option to help with staffing levels. || Hopes that the library uses data to mindfully allocate resources
- **Relationship with Public Schools (2):** Build/strengthen the relationship between the town library and local school libraries || New superintendent for the school district. Possible collaboration with Houghton and Chocksett to add public library services for kids that want to read but have obstacles getting to the Library.
- **Digital Literacy Needs:** Offer digital literacy resources to help people, especially school-age children, and lifelong learners, identify fake information/news/political disinformation
- **Environmental Issues:** How 'green' can the library become? Lower the carbon footprint, make it environmentally conscious
- **Political/Governance Changes:** Periodically, an issue comes up where the town charter could be revised so that the Select Board would govern the Library.
- The library should remain a physical gathering place for the community.
- Continue to offer resources that meet important community needs, such as high-speed internet.
- Provide information about local government to encourage/increase civic engagement.

COMMENT:

- The mask issue should be revisited.
- Participant hopes censorship challenges aren't raised here.

12. WHAT ELSE CAN THE LIBRARY DO TO BETTER SERVE STERLING GOING FORWARD? WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE?

- Offering more museum passes would be nice.
- Clean up duplicate/different edition records in the CW MARS catalog.
- Would like it if the staff would curate book bundles for patrons.
- The Library is in a great position to help families with early intervention—when they face special challenges.
- Neurodiverse picture books would be a helpful addition to the collection.
- Keep pushing to the community the benefits of the library, continue to promote library services
- Would like to see classic books promoted more.

COMMENTS:

- Museum passes as physical pieces of paper make them not worth bothering with.
- Super excited that in-person programming is back.
- The staff did an amazing job dealing with curbside pickup during the pandemic.