ELLSWORTH PUBLIC LIBRARY

Strategic Plan

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ELLSWORTH PUBLIC LIBRARY STRATEGIC PLAN

The Ellsworth Public Library Strategic Plan is an opportunity to set a vision for the Library and to build on the success of the last several years. The most recent plan was adopted in 2018 and was designed for the years 2019-2021. Since then, the Library has moved locations, grown their community, expanded their programs, and adapted to an ever-changing world during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The new location has provided the opportunity to expand the Library's services. The Library is truly a hub of the community, serving as a 'third place' for visitors young and old who access Library materials, build community through formal programs and informal interactions, and continue with lifelong learning. This revised plan provides a framework for decision-making for the next three to five years. It identifies goals for the Library to continue serving the Ellsworth community and to ensure the Library continues to be an asset for everyone. The plan was developed with assistance from a faculty member and student from the University of Wisconsin - River Falls Community and Environmental Planning program.

Mission Statement

The Ellsworth Public Library will provide a safe, welcoming environment with a variety of resources and programming to educate and inform visitors. We will support the free access to information and ideas and serve the public through a variety of enriching programs that expand their understanding of the world.

Vision Statement

The Library will be a resource for the region providing open access to information, resources, and programming to serve diverse needs. We believe in promoting the love of reading and the power of literacy and knowledge. We will be a place where ideas flourish, lives are enriched, and a sense of community is created.

Culture Statement

The Library is committed to free and equitable access to information, where different viewpoints and opinions are valued, and all are welcome. It is a safe and welcoming place where everyone can feel comfortable and be able to access entertainment, information, support, and community.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The process of writing a plan starts with community engagement and feedback. A Library usage survey was written and distributed to Library employees, Friends of the Library, the Library Board, community members, and Ellsworth Middle School students. After having the survey available, both online and paper copies for about a month, the results were calculated and examined. 238 total surveys were received. Below are the results from each question addressed in the survey.

Age

The survey reached individuals ages 12-65+ with the majority being 12-18 and 40-49. Surveys were brought to the Teen Meet Up event and to Ellsworth Middle School for middle schoolers to fill out. They were eager to give their input and had the highest age group response rate. There were surveys received from all age groups. The diversity of responses from different age groups ensures that results reflect Library users and the broader community, providing quality information for decision-making.

Household type

Over half of the surveys came from individuals in family households with children, at 178 responses. The remainder were split between families with no children at home, at 43, and single people, at 20.

Frequency of visiting the Library

Families reported visiting the Library in a wide range of frequency. Individuals could choose weekly, 2-3 times per month, monthly, 3-4 times per year, or never. These responses were approximately equally distributed, with 2-3 times per month being the highest, and never being the lowest. This shows that respondents value the Library and make it a regular part of their lives, visiting frequently. The range of programming options and materials and services available provide many reasons for people to visit.

Frequency of using Library services

The usage of online Library services such as Libby was much lower than visiting the Library in person. 107 people reported never using these services and the remainder of responses ranged between weekly usage and 3-4 times a year. This is an indication that people value the Library for more than just the available books; they appreciate the sense of connection and community that comes from being at the Library and the opportunity that it provides to engage with others.

Services used in the last 12 months & satisfaction

The service most used in the last 12 months was checking out books/audiobooks. Libby access, DVDs/music/video games and Library Wi-Fi were also among the most used services. Least used was the portable Wi-Fi hotspots. Computers, printers, newspapers, local history/ genealogy, and backpack kits were all other services listed and had an approximately equal usage response. Overall, people ranked their satisfaction in Library services as good or very good, with no responses in the poor or very poor categories. It is unusual to see across the board positive responses in a (mostly) on-line survey, often people take the opportunity to complain through this type of forum. This indicates the high value placed on the Library by community members and the positive image it has.

Programs participated in at Library

Library programs were reported to be widely attended. The highest attended was exhibits, closely followed by youth programs, usage of the meeting spaces, and the 'other' category. Those who selected 'other' specified going to tech time, youth programs on no school days, teen meet ups, makerspace, and movie month. People, again, are overall very satisfied with the programs the Library offers, with no responses in the poor or very poor categories.

Barriers to entry for Library programs

There were a wide range of responses to the barriers to entry question. Many reported times being inconvenient, accessibility (e.g. not walkable), programs not meeting interest or needs, Library hours, not knowing what is provided, ability to access what they need at home, using other resources like Barnes and Noble, or overall, not having enough time in their personal life

to make it to the Library. This question provided ideas that have been incorporated into plan goals, addressing the concerns that are identified and ensuring accessibility for all.

<u>How can the Library serve children?</u>

Most responses to this open-ended question were positive remarks about the services the Library offers to children. Suggestions included adding a sensory room, introducing children to more books, offering more learning opportunities over the summer, more programs for children under 5, or toddler specific play groups.

<u>Additional programs people would like to see</u>

There were a range of responses to this question, making it difficult to identify a common theme. The Library provides a diverse array of programs for all age groups and interests from art, Legos, game time, and more. The key issue may be in communication and ensuring programs are widely advertised and shared so people know what is available.

<u>Additional comments</u>

The open-ended comments were universally positive, with many respondents acknowledging the importance of the Library and how much they appreciate everything available. Library staff were recognized for their friendliness and helpfulness, along with comments on how much people valued the Library as an institution and benefit to Ellsworth.

In addition to the survey, a series of meetings were held with the Library Board, Friends of the Library, Library staff, seniors, and middle schoolers to further develop issues and opportunities. These meetings provided insight into the challenges and opportunities presented by moving into the new, larger building and recovering from COVID, and also provided ideas for moving forward. The seniors and middle schoolers echoed data from the survey with strong support for the Library, recognition of the value it provides to them, and appreciation for the variety of opportunities available to them.

Using the information from the survey and meetings, a series of goals were identified that will build on current success and position the Library to maximize the benefits of its new space and continue to support Ellsworth residents as a place for them to learn, play, and grow.

GOALS

These goals provide a framework for decision-making for the Library Board, Friends of the Library, and Library staff. They are based on the engagement summarized above and discussions with Library staff and supporters. Implementation of these goals will position the Library for continued success to meet the changing needs and expectations and maintain the high level of support from community members. The goals are not just meant for Library staff to implement; the plan is intended as a document for the Board and Friends group to support the staff, as well as the community at large to identify ways they can support the Library through volunteering, fundraising, and other actions. A detailed action guide is included as an appendix to this plan.

Work with Friends of the Library to Formalize a Fundraising Program

The recent move of the Library to a larger space was the result of significant work and fundraising to support renovation and moving. This effort was very successful and a sign of community support and appreciation. Since the move, the Friends of the Ellsworth Public Library has continued with fundraising efforts; however, these have largely been on a somewhat ad hoc basis. The Library receives funds from the Village and County, as well as grants and other sources, but community fundraising is an important element in maintaining and expanding opportunities.

There should be an exploration of formalizing current fundraising activities by reviewing past programs, identifying those that have been most successful, and incorporating them into an annual fundraising program. The Friends of the Library has had success with pledge drives in the past and can possibly make this an annual event or create an on-going pledge drive where businesses and / or individuals can provide regular monthly or annual donations. The challenge with this may be putting additional burden on staff and current volunteers, so volunteer recruitment and retention (discussed below) will be a need. Formalizing fundraising will provide more stability to the Library budget, allowing for more confident predictions of revenue to

support new or expanded programming, facility and material needs, etc. The Library Board and Friends of the Library are the appropriate place for these efforts as they currently provide direction and support.

<u>Physical Improvements</u>

The new Library is a much larger space allowing for an expanded collection and more programming than could be offered in the former location. The new location is also much more visible to the community with more parking and access. However, there are some limitations that should be addressed to ensure accessibility and the opportunity to support growing demand for programming. The biggest need is for a larger meeting space for exhibitions, author talks, and other activities. As the Village moves forward with the planning for this move, the Library should be involved to determine what, if any, support may be needed to address Library needs as part of any renovation. These discussions should continue and coordination on this project should be a priority.

The visibility of the Library offers an opportunity for public art on the exterior of the building, possibly through a mural on the side. This would add a point of interest to downtown Ellsworth and raise the profile to the Library to visitors. Other opportunities to partner with local artists to install art on the Library site should be explored as well. Landscaping improvements can also be considered as part of the Village office relocation project.

Accessibility to the building and within the building has been identified. The location on Main Street is convenient; however, safety, especially for children walking from the schools as they cross Main Street is an issue. The Library should work with the Village and WI DOT to improve safe access across Main Street and work with the school district to see if having an after-school bus can be reinstated. This was available before COVID, but limited bus drivers and other issues may make this infeasible. Improved signage directing visitors to parking on the side should also be considered to ensure adequate parking and direct drivers from Main Street to the available parking on the side of the building.

Finally, improvements to accessibility inside the building should be considered. An automatic door is being installed soon; however, the stairs are a potential barrier to access from the Main

Street entrance. Once the doors are installed, additional changes may be needed to ensure access for all visitors.

<u>Program Improvements</u>

As mentioned, the Library already hosts a range of programming for all ages. Book talks, reading clubs, game nights, and more all attract a diverse audience and build community. One issue identified in the survey was that some adults wanted to attend events but could not find childcare. This could be addressed by coordinating youth and adult activities, allowing parents to leave their kids supervised and entertained while they participate in a different activity.

Another identified opportunity is to support high sensory needs children and adults with targeted programming. This could include activities and appropriate interaction for these individuals to be part of the community in a comfortable space. Home schoolers are another group that can be supported. There have been efforts to build a connection with home school groups and families and these should be continued. These young people would benefit from Library services and resources, and this can be a meaningful base of further support for the Library.

Pop-up libraries are a way to bring the Library out into the community. These can be coordinated with other community events, Senior lunches, and other activities that bring people together. It is a way to make the Library more accessible and expand the profile to people who may not be able to visit the Library because of work schedules, transportation limits, etc. This would likely require some planning and more volunteers but should be explored as an opportunity. Finally, the Library should continue to engage with visitors to understand changing needs and interests and continue to review existing programming and opportunities to revise or add new programs as need arises.

<u>Service Improvements</u>

There is always a need to make more people aware of everything the Library does and to invite more people to be Library users. Every effort should be made to raise awareness, leveraging existing connections into the community and ensuring people know about programs and

services available to them. Libraries are one of the few, free services available to everyone so letting people know about it is vital. The Library uses social media and other platforms to connect with residents and these should be continued and expanded. Additionally, activities like the pop-up Library discussed above can be an opportunity to directly engage with people at community events. All avenues should be pursued as resources are available to inform more people and build connections into community groups, business owners, and others to let them know about available meeting rooms, programs, and other services that can be utilized.

Another opportunity is to expand Library access by making it easier for students to get Library cards and partnering with local organizations to explore home delivery options. This would allow young people, homebound seniors, and others to access Library materials in a convenient manner. This also can include physical access to the Library. As mentioned above, the Library had an after-school bus stop that was discontinued during COVID; this option should be reinstated if feasible. Technology access is also important. The Library has Wi-Fi hotspots available and offers on-site Wi-Fi. These services are critical for many who cannot afford at home internet services and to support business owners and others looking for a quiet place to get work done.

<u>Volunteer Recruitment and Retention</u>

The Library is fortunate to have a core group of volunteers to support programming and services, yet recruiting and retaining volunteers remains a challenge. As life seems to always get busier, ensuring an adequate number of volunteers can seem like a full-time job in itself. The best way to recruit volunteers is to build connections through the existing volunteer pool, asking folks to invite their friends and family to serve. There are also opportunities through the relationship with the school district to expand opportunities for students. College admissions and employers look at volunteering as criteria, so this is an opportunity for students to get hours and real-world experience that can help them with college and job applications. Additionally, the Library should connect with other organizations to help foster relationships with them to increase the volunteer pool and connect volunteers with service opportunities that meet their interests and skill set. By expanding the volunteer population, the Library can

offer even more to the community and meet growing needs for services without over-working the already hard-working staff and volunteers that are available.

CONCLUSION

The Ellsworth Public Library is in excellent shape. It is beloved in the community and has a strong foundation of support. It provides a diverse range of materials, services, and programming to the public. This success is seen in the facility itself, the new building showcases the vitality of the Library and its place in the community. This plan is an opportunity to leverage that legacy by building on what is already being done well and by providing new opportunities. The Library represents community in the highest sense; it is available to all, providing opportunities for life-long learning, access to information and support, and a place for visitors of all ages to engage with one another and have fun in the process.

Goal	
Work with Friends of the Library to Formalize a Fundraising Program	
Action	Projects
Review existing fundraisers and determine which are most successful	
Determine capacity to conduct annual fundraisers	
	Examine organizational capacity to support additional fundraising
	Develop Volunteer Capacity to support fundraising efforts
Develop schedule for regular fundraiser programs, such as membership drive, pledge drive/letter campaign, fundraising opportunities with local partners, annual event at the library, etc.	
Explore the idea of recruiting annual memberships/pledges from local companies	
Continue on-going communication with Village and County to ensure secure funding	

Goal	
Physical Improvements	
Action	Projects
Work with Village to plan for Village relocation and renovation of basement, ideally including large community/meeting space	
	Establish working group with Village to plan for move and needed improvements
	Determine what, if any, funding would be required from Library to support additional meeting space
	Develop fundraising plan if needed for improvements
Explore options for exterior improvements	
	Recruit regional professional artist for mural on side of building
	Move forward with exterior landscaping once lower level plans are finalized

Goal	
Program Improvements	
Action	Projects
Consider providing coordinated youth and adult programming/childcare to allow adults to participate in programs and have supervision of kids	
Consider programming for high sensory youth, play dates for socialization	
Expand outreach and communication with home school population to understand needs and programming opportunities	
Implement new adult programs based on community feedback to promote lifelong learning	
Explore options for exterior improvements	
Pop up library – bring books, etc. for people to check out at Senior events, other community events	

Goal	
Service Improvements	
Action	Projects
Promote the library collection through readers' advisory, displays, programs, and community connections	
Promote the meeting room and study rooms through community connections	
Explore improved library card accessibility	
	Develop home delivery policy
	Reach out to ADRC, Ellsworth Health Services, Meal on Wheels, Preferred Senior Living, and others to promote home delivery service
	Partner with school district on a system for address verification for students in place of requirement for in-person guardian presence at the library
Explore coordination of bus stop option at the library after school	
Continue addressing technology access for community	

Goal	
Volunteer Recruitment and Retention	
Action	Projects
Work with current volunteers, library staff, Friends, and Board members to identify volunteer needs and potential volunteers	
Reach out to Community Summit contacts to increase volunteer pool and share volunteer opportunities	
Continue to work with school district to recruit student volunteers	