BEALS MEMORIAL LIBRARY

LONG RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN

2020 - 2025

50 Pleasant Street, Winchendon, MA 01475
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www.bealslibrary.org
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Board of Trustee Approval

The Beals Memorial Library Strategic Plan, July 2020 - June 2025 was formally approved by the Board of Library Trustees on April 28, 2020 by a unanimous vote.

Ronald Muse, Chair

Cindy Darcy, Vice Chair

Suzanne Rader, Secretary

Robert Courtemanche

Jane LaPointe

Richard Ward
Mission Statement

The Beals Memorial Library provides a free and open environment where all may gather for education, culture and information. The library seeks to inspire and encourage literacy, growth and lifelong learning.

Library History

During the first half of the 19th century, Winchendon had several small library collections such as school district libraries, an agricultural library and Sunday school libraries. In the later part of that century, a movement began for a more permanent library. This was ignited by a lecture on “Reading” by the Rev. A.P. Marvin who closed his lecture with a call for a library to provide “a fountain of improvement and of happiness; an inexhaustible spring of the purest, richest nutriment for the immortal minds of the youth of this generation, and of the many generations that are to come.” At the close of this meeting, a Literary Association was formed. This group raised money to purchase books and bookcases. Over the years the library was housed in various locations on Front and Central Streets.

In March 1867, the Literary Association passed the library into the possession of the Town of Winchendon. In 1876, part of the library and several hundred volumes were burned in a fire. The library was then moved to the new engine house on Pleasant Street. In 1887 the library moved into the Town Hall, located in the room that is currently the Town Clerk’s office with a reading room facing the street. The library remained at the overcrowded Town Hall until 1913.

At a special town meeting on June 5, 1909, Mr. Charles L. Beals, a local businessman, offered $25,000 to the town for “a public library to be called the Beals Memorial Library in memory of my wife, Hattie M. Beals, and George L. Beals and family.” The offer was accepted. On September 30, 1913, Beals Memorial Library was dedicated before a capacity audience at Town Hall. The new building was 70 x 60 feet, made of Indiana limestone with granite trimmings and with mahogany finish throughout. It contained a reading room, children’s room, reference room, stackroom and auditorium and housed 10,850 books.

Winchendon’s library is listed on the National Historic Register. For over a hundred years, the Beals Memorial Library contributed to residents’ quality of life by serving as a center for education, culture, recreation and information. However, as originally designed, the building became less welcoming to anyone who could not easily climb the many exterior steps to access the building or the twenty-four steps to the rooms and programs on the second floor. This applied not just to the elderly but also to parents or families pushing strollers, as well as to other less abled people.

Plans to make the library fully accessible started in the late 1990’s as a full renovation and expansion, including an addition, elevator, new children’s room, repurposed space
for teens/young adults and parking lot. Over the years the scope of the project was scaled back due to lack of funds. The final project became a new sidewalk level entrance with an elevator to all floors, stairway and two bathrooms; all ADA compliant. Work on this project started early in 2017. With the grand opening on October 20, 2018, Beals Memorial Library truly became a “public library” - now accessible to all the people of Winchendon. This project was accomplished with financial support from the Town of Winchendon, Robinson-Broadhurst Foundation and most of the available library’s trust and gift funds.

**Planning Methodology**

The Board of Trustees and Library Director met initially in FY2018 to outline the planning process and to identify a subcommittee to coordinate the development of this plan. The planning process was framed to address four interrelated purposes: programs and services, financial planning, capital planning, and administration and management.

The *Strategic Planning for Results* method, developed by Sandra Nelson for the Public Library Association, was used to inform our planning, particularly the focus on Service Responses. Planning activities were designed to complement the completion of the Library’s accessibility project and the resulting increase in programs and participation that was made possible by having an accessible library.

A community poll of Service Responses was conducted at a Library Open House, to celebrate the completion of the Library accessibility project. This was followed up by a community survey that was available online and in hard copy and was promoted using Library, Town, School System and supporters’ social media. The poll and surveys were further enriched by discussions with public school administrators.

The Trustees, Library Director and a Trustee Planning Subcommittee worked with these results and with current and emerging plans from other related community initiatives to draft a strategic plan for a new decade. This plan reflects these various inputs as well as a realistic assessment of what can be accomplished given the available resources, space and capacity.

Plans for a final review of this strategic plan with specific community stakeholder groups and library patrons have been put on hold, pending state coronavirus guidelines. We anticipate updating this plan, as necessary, once we can reconvene and reassess community needs in a post-coriavirus world.

This plan is presented with the understanding that the best plans are those that are used and with results that are periodically assessed in order to capture new insights and to adjust the plan to reflect that learning.
User Needs Assessment

Community Profile/Community Conditions/ Needs

Current information was assembled from *The Town of Winchendon Master Plan Update*, which is currently in its final draft stages by the Winchendon Department of Planning and Development with input from the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission and from Heywood Hospital’s Health Assessment.

Historical information was summarized from the Library’s FY2005-FY2009 Long Range Plan.

Our Town
Winchendon is located in northern Worcester County on the New Hampshire border. The Town encompasses 44 square miles.

Winchendon was incorporated as a town in 1764. By the 1800’s Winchendon began to grow as a manufacturing town, spurred by timber, water power and the arrival of rail service in the 1840’s. By 1870 mill owners were traveling to Canada to hire workers. Subsequent waves of Irish and Italian immigrants found work and homes in Winchendon. During the following decades Winchendon grew and prospered.

Unfortunately, many of Winchendon’s businesses did not survive the Great Depression, the floods in the 1930’s, the end of rail service, the relocation of manufacturing to the South, and the proliferation of out of town shopping centers. The Town is heavily reliant on its residential tax base and has limited employment opportunities for its residents.

During the 1980’s and 1990’s Winchendon’s population increased as many new residents moved to Winchendon because they could find affordable homes and commute to work.

Current Community Conditions: Our People
As of the most recent American Community Survey (2013-2017) estimates, the Town of Winchendon is home to 10,738 residents. The town’s population continues to grow at a faster rate than both Worcester County and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

There are an estimated 3,889 households in Winchendon, with an average household size of 2.69 person. Approximately 30.2% of households include children under the age of 18, and 40.7% of households have at least one resident over the age of 60.

In recent decades, the town’s population has been aging steadily. In 1990, the median age in Winchendon was 31.0 years old; today the average age has shifted to 41.3 years old. However, compared with the region and state, Winchendon has a higher percentage of children under age 5 (7.7%), individuals between 25-34 years old (13.4%), and single headed households with children (7.1%).
With this is a shift to a more diverse and younger generation. 86.4% of school-aged children classify as white compared to 96.3% of the population overall. The largest growth is among Hispanic, Asian and multi-racial populations. The American Community Survey 2012-2016 estimates Winchendon’s racial makeup as 2.9% Hispanic or Latino; 0.9% Black or African American; 1.9% Mixed Race; 0.3% Asian; and 0.6% Other, including Native American.

The American Community Survey 2012-2016 estimates for measures of wealth show that Winchendon is below State averages: Per capita income = $27,530, Median household income = $61,998; Median family income = $80,060.

This Survey also reports that 11.8% of Winchendon’s residents have income below the poverty level. This includes 18.9% of residents under age 18, 44.2% of residents under age 5; and 6.1% of residents over age 65. According to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 52.2% of children in the Winchendon public preschool are economically disadvantaged and 60% of all public school students qualify for free/reduced lunch, an increase of 15% over 5 years.

Looking at educational attainment for Winchendon residents 25 years and over: 31% have an associates, bachelors or graduate degree; 20.6% have some college; 36.5% are high school graduates; and 11.9% have no high school diploma.

Winchendon Public Schools, elementary, middle and high schools, are operating with turnaround plans meant to improve outcomes for students and families. These plans follow a MA DOE framework.

**Vision for Success**

**Community Members**

Residents of the Town of Winchendon were surveyed at the Grand Opening of our Accessible Entrance in October 2018 and throughout 2019. The purpose was to identify the services community members felt were most important for Winchendon and to identify where people felt the Library should have its biggest positive effect on the community. Below is a compilation of the results of these surveys.

The results have been categorized by Service Responses that the Long Range Planning Committee and Board of Trustees have prioritized as feasible options as the Library grows into the future.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Service Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Early Literacy (Age 0-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Elementary Age Literacy (Learning to Read; Reading to Learn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Community Resources &amp; Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Lifelong Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Physical &amp; Virtual Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cultural Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Reading, Viewing, &amp; Listening for Pleasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Teen Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Public Internet Access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Health, Wealth, &amp; Other Life Choices</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Information Fluency</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Job &amp; Career Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Adult, Family, &amp; Immigrant Literacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Genealogy &amp; Local History</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Homework Help</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Create &amp; Share Content</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Ready Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Local, National, World Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Business &amp; Non-Profit Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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A review of comments from the surveys also points to the following broad opportunities for the Library to best serve the community:

- As a resource for the entire town; serving all ages with a variety of programs
- A strong focus on literacy and education, school related and lifelong learning, for all ages and abilities
- A comfortable, inviting physical space able to meet the needs of multiple users from stimulating children’s activities to quiet reading

**Winchendon Public Schools**

**Superintendent of Schools**

The Library Director and a Trustee met with the Superintendent to discuss options to strengthen the connections between the public library and our public schools. Three of our four schools are on a State turnaround plan. One aspect of these plans is to build more effective links and relationships between our schools, our students and our town.
Opportunities recommended by the Superintendent to explore, prioritize and develop with the school principals, teachers and students include

- Resumption of school summer reading lists
- Collaboration based on the curriculum and an assessment of how students could make use of the library’s resources and space, and related to this --
- Use of the schools’ access to free bussing during school hours for transportation to the library
- Partnering with the local Changemakers Initiative

**Trustees & Director**

At an initial planning meeting in 2017 and as planning discussions took place, the Trustees and Library Director outlined their vision for success. Two fundamental values for success were identified based on our understanding of the needs and opportunities of our Town and the position we believe the Library could hold.

1. Contribute to the vitality, growth and pride of Winchendon
   - Make Winchendon attractive to younger people and families
   - Build literacy, creativity and a lifelong interest in learning
   - Stimulate interest in our collective and individual histories and their relationships to today
   - Create a place and opportunity for people of all ages to learn, participate, connect, become more visible and valued
   - Create a sense of belonging and an environment and place for the free exchange of ideas

2. Embody the Welcome to Winchendon tagline of “Winchendon Working Together”
   - Use our programs and strategic plan to build collaboration and inclusion
   - Plan and implement our programs and services with other organizations, individuals, departments and committees in Town and the region
   - Engage more people and organizations across the Town in working toward individual and community wellbeing; expand our impact through partnerships and our collective use of resources, skills and experiences

**Summary**

The goals that follow reflect our current assessment of how to best respond to community needs and address the vision for success. As was noted earlier in this document, our plans for a final review of this strategic plan with specific community stakeholder groups and library patrons have been put on hold, pending State coronavirus guidelines. We anticipate updating this plan, as necessary, once we can reconvene and reassess community needs in a post-coronavirus world.

At that time, we will also develop an appropriate action plan to guide our work and will submit this to the MBLC.
Goals and Objectives

Overall Goals

1. Expand community engagement with the Library
   - Identify and build collaborations with targeted partners to amplify the Library’s limited resources and to tap into the skills and experience in the community for specific priority programs or services

2. Expand community use of the Library; broaden the relevance of the Library in the Town and in the lives of community members
   - Continue to build and improve communication across the community to strength awareness and relevance of programs
   - Involve the community in planning and partnerships to better understand and meet unmet and underserved needs
   - Offer programs, services and materials that meet the needs and enrich the lives of residents of all ages and abilities

Service/Program Goals

1. Grow literacy across ages; meet basic literacy needs for specific populations/ages; evaluate and implement ways to motivate, inspire, encourage and improve reading
   - Evaluate where current programs are effective in terms of reach and outcomes and where there are critical gaps to be filled

2. Expand the Library’s role in education and in lifelong learning
   - Build collaborative relationships with school principals, teachers and staff to identify opportunities for curriculum support
   - Create education programs for teens and adults of all ages; conduct additional outreach with partners to identify and deliver priority education and lifelong learning topics for community members

3. Preserve and improve access to the Library’s historical materials that are unique to our Town; promote awareness, interest and use of these resources
   - Secure grants to complete the digitation of the microfilm and paper collection of the Winchendon Courier. Identify additional materials that should be preserved or that could be digitized as part of the BPL Digital Commonwealth
   - Develop intergenerational programs to build awareness of our history and to link this to the present. Partner with the schools and relevant community organizations and individuals to bring our history alive and make it relevant
Facility/Capital Planning Goals

1. Redesign and envision the use of each of the library’s three floors to make more effective use of space and to inform a long term capital improvement plan
   - Priority on: children’s room, teen/young adult space, staff workspace/storage, quiet reading/study spaces and improved furnishings for comfort, usability and flexibility

2. Prioritize building repair, maintenance and safety
   - Update electrical system, fire suppression and maintain the structural and operating integrity of the historic library building

3. Create a capital financing plan, time line and rationale/justification to meet priority needs
   - Work with the Town to secure funding

Financial Planning Goals

1. Project annual and multi-year need for funds to operate the library, maintain State Certification and fund the program/service goals of this strategic plan

2. Build visibility and support in Town for well-documented increases in the BML town appropriated budget

3. Develop a comprehensive marketing plan to support fundraising and budget planning

4. Work with community partners to identify and pursue grants to fund collaborative programs

Administration & Management Goals

1. Policies: establish structure and process to ensure policies are followed, updated as needed and effectively passed on to future Directors, Staff, Trustees and Volunteers

2. Financial Operating Procedures: document processes, templates/worksheets and reports, account numbers and provide details to ensure the accurate management, use and oversight of BML accounts: budget, trusts, state aid, revolving cash accounts, payroll, etc. by BML Director, Staff and Trustees

3. Personnel: document policies and practices to guide oversight and administration by the Library Director: job descriptions, contracts, evaluations, training & skill building
4. **Volunteers**: develop and document a forward looking policy and role for volunteers; address "job" opportunities, recruitment, screening, evaluation, termination

5. **Trustees**: create a practical and accessible Trustee handbook with guidelines and standards re: responsibilities, meeting participation, time commitments, open meeting law. Establish a process to periodically review Board performance