

Chester Public Library Long Range Plan March 2014

Executive Summary

Chester is an evolving community of nearly 4000 individuals - with families of deep generational roots living right alongside transplants from out of state. There are local merchants, builders, artists, writers, craftsmen, lawyers, commuters, teachers, students and more. Over the years, many have had an enduring relationship with the Chester Public Library. For some, it's a quiet place to browse and think; for others, it's a place to bring the kids on a rainy day and share a love of reading; for others still, it's a place to pause and inquire, pick up a book, and find out what's going on in town.

Regardless of their relationship with the library, most residents have an opinion about what the town library should be like - what new collections the library should provide; what subjects and formats would generate their interest; what kind of programs should be offered that would come close to matching the quality of the popular "Chester Voices" series and the late Professor Johnston's lively book discussions. There has been a lot of discussion about the state of the building - the tiny, one hundred-year-old landmark that sits on ground owned by the church and that has not seen substantial renovation since the 1960's. With space at a premium; each acquisition demands a discard, and there is little room for programs or displays. The library's steep and treacherous stairs restrict access to strollers and wheelchairs alike and office space for staff does not exist. Even so, despite ongoing talk of moving to a bigger building, most residents secretly hope that this charming and historic library on West Main Street can somehow, someday, reinvent itself to meet the needs of the community. And given that Chester, happily bound by national forests and waterways, has at most 1,000 buildable lots in its future, explosive growth in library use is probably not what the town should be planning for.

To address these issues, the Board of the Chester Public Library decided to begin a comprehensive community needs assessment in the fall of 2008. It had been four years since town residents had been officially surveyed about the library. With the completion of the automated circulation system in 2007, all past goals had been met. This new assessment would look at the collections and programs the community desires and use that information to set priorities for at least the next five years. Those priorities would hopefully determine the need, if any, for a new or expanded facility.

The Process

- **Long Range Planning Committee:** First, the Library Board formed a long range planning committee to generate new thinking about the town of Chester and the kind of library that would best reflect its culture.
- **Brainstorm Kickoff:** Chris Bradley of the CT Consortium of Libraries led a brainstorm discussion which generated words and phrases like unique, maintain the excellence, blend of old and new, artistic, funky, authentic, comfortable and resourceful when discussing the town and its preferred library.
- **Town Survey:** The Board later developed and conducted a town wide survey available on-line and in print which ended in May 2009.
- **Focus Groups:** Following the survey, facilitator Peg Reyer of the Chester Company led three adult focus groups and one group of sixth graders from Chester Elementary to explore and probe more deeply the issues raised in the survey.

Hundreds of residents participated in these various research efforts.

Key Findings

The following is a summary of findings that were consistent across all phases of the research. Please see survey and focus group results found in the Appendix for more detailed findings and messages.

- Residents want this long-range plan to **result in significant changes to the library**. Keeping the status quo is unacceptable.
- **Increasing the number of hours** the library is open is change number one. The hours must also be consistent and easy to remember.
- Town pride is evident. Residents **want the library to reflect their town and its people** – what they call Chester essence. It should be unique, charming, comfortable, high tech and high quality, collaborative, resourceful, right-sized. They don't want a big library just because other towns have big libraries. New technologies and population down-sizing may soon make big new spaces unnecessary and even an ill-conceived choice.
- **More people would prefer to modify the existing building to make it accessible (if that is possible) than to move to a different building** – but they want to rethink the space based on the advice of experts. A little expansion can go a long way, they say, if it's carefully thought out and not over-consumptive.
- Chester residents see **exceptional programming** as the best way to draw a broader group of residents into the library and make up for what it lacks in amenities and space.
- What participants **like best** about the library are the knowledgeable, friendly, courteous staff, the inter-library loan system, the library's location in the center of town, the architecture and history of the building, distinctive book discussions, the children's story hour and museum passes.
- What **they like least** are the inconsistent hours, the building's lack of access, the stairs, the lack of comfortable places to sit and read and hold programs, only one computer, the unattractive basement; no fun space for children; very few resources for tweens and young adults

- For now, books remain the heart of the library, although residents would be receptive to exploring new formats. They want more adult fiction and nonfiction books, more DVDs and more computers.

Key Recommendations

The library board of trustees developed the following recommendations to address the findings above.

- Increase library hours to four full-time weekdays including lunchtime, with one full weekday closed for administrative tasks; one weekday evening of extended hours, all-day Saturday open and all-day Sunday closed.
- Select a space/infrastructure committee to develop a list of key parameters for updated library space with improved access for all patrons including those with disabilities.
- Hire an architect/space expert to come up with a final plan for how to reconfigure the interior space of the library building to make it more accessible and create more room for technology, programming, kid space, office space and overall comfort and ambience.
- Provide current technology as a critical library resource, including continued WIFI access, more computers, expanding access to digital content and online databases; as well as advanced training in computerized search for all staff-members; and electronic resource centers or kiosks for in-demand activities such as job searches and income tax filing.
- Hire a part-time program director to focus on creating unique programming that reflects the interests and age groups of Chester residents.
- Form an advisory group of children and tweens to be involved in the creation of kidspace and the ongoing selection of kids programming and resources.
- Form a fund-raising committee to explore alternative sources of funding and begin to plan ongoing fund-raising activities.
- Promote library services and programs in the community through ongoing publicity and partnerships with the school system, local artists and writers, senior citizens, other tri-town libraries, etc.

A Note of Thanks

The CPL Long Range Planning Committee and Library Board wish to thank Chester residents and library staff for offering their time, opinions, suggestions and assistance in the creation of this plan.

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The Chester Public Library

Brief History

The Chester Library Association, founded in 1875, was the forerunner of the present Chester Public Library. Chester residents could join the association for \$3 and borrow one book a week. The Library Association inhabited space as available in various buildings, including the Stone Store and the top floor of the Old Selectman's building. In 1875, the association was dissolved and the library became a town institution, open three times a week and receiving support from the town and state. In 1907, Chester native S. Mills Ely had a library building built for the town, in honor of his parents; when opened, it had 3500 volumes available for lending. The Ecclesiastical Society of the Congregational Church (the United Church of Chester) deeded the land on which it was built, with the stipulation that it must always be used as the site for a public library. The property would revert back to the church if the library was closed for a year or put to a different use. The two-story building is approximately 2,200 square feet. The lower level, a former basement, was upgraded in the 1960's to display books and other materials. Throughout the years, there have been many alterations and innovations made to the interior of the building. In 2007, the library implemented a computerized circulation system, thanks to volunteers who bar-coded over 18,000 items in the winter and spring of that year. The library, which hosts popular programs for both children and adults, is currently open six days a week with varying hours. The library is a town-owned building supervised by an elected board of trustees.

Mission

The mission of the Chester Public Library is to provide information, selected cultural events and intellectual recreation to all the citizens of Chester through the provision of an organized collection of print, multimedia and electronic resources. This mission shall be met by the services of a trained professional staff and support personnel in an atmosphere that is welcoming, respectful and businesslike.

The Library shall actively encourage the use of its materials, seek to keep residents of all ages informed of available resources, and foster the intellectual growth, character and cohesiveness of the community.

Vision

To serve as a free, welcoming center of enrichment and learning for the Chester community providing:

A diverse and changing collection as well as a more permanent representation of well-known classics;

- *Knowledgeable, friendly and responsive staff;*
- *Technology connecting our community to the global information world;*
- *A variety of library services and programs for all ages; and.*
- *A comfortable, accessible facility in which to gather, share and create.*

Profile of the Library

The following statistics from **Connecticut Public Libraries: A Statistical Profile, July 2012 - June 2013** provide a profile of the library.

Registered patrons: 2036 (1637 Chester residents, 399 out of town users; only individuals with currently active cards as of 6/30/2013)

Town population: 4245

Annual circulation: 28,300 (7.07 items per capita)

Items borrowed by Chester patrons when visiting other libraries (Connecticard): 19,577 (most used libraries were Deep River, Essex, and Old Saybrook which account for 13,034 of these items)

Items loaned to out-of-towners visiting Chester Library (Connecticard): 2495 (most visitors from Madison, Deep River, Killingworth)

Library Collection:

- Books: 17,733
- Magazines and newspapers: 64 periodicals and 5 newspapers
- Movies: 1058
- Sound recordings: 663

Library Services:

- Weekly story and craft time for preschoolers
- Summer reading and school vacation programs for children
- Summer book discussions for teens
- Book discussions and reading incentive programs for adults
- Access to online resources such as Job Now and Mango Languages
- Access to downloadable audio and ebooks
- Rotating collections of Audio and Large Print books
- Passes to museums and local attractions
- Automated circulation system that allows remote access for patrons
- Wi-Fi Internet access
- State-wide Interlibrary Loan
- Ad hoc material delivery to individuals unable to visit the library

Library Comparisons

The Chester Library Board began its planning process by examining and comparing data from other libraries in Connecticut. The Board (and later the Long Range Planning Committee) looked at data relative to: 1) libraries in ten Connecticut towns closest in population size to Chester; 2) libraries in eight Connecticut towns of similar wealth; and 3) six libraries in Connecticut towns that are close neighbors of Chester. (The following comparisons are based on 2012-2013 data.)

1. Relative to the libraries in the ten Connecticut towns closest in population size to Chester (including Ashford, Bethlehem, Bolton, Deep River, Middlefield, Pomfret, Preston, Salisbury, Sherman, and Sterling, , ranging in population from 3566– 4960, with Chester being 4245), the Chester Public Library:

- Is the 3rd wealthiest, based on AENGLC Rank.¹
- Is the only building not at least partially wheelchair accessible.²

- Has the fewest public access computers- one. Others in the group have from 4-9 computers for public use.
- Has the 2nd smallest building at .47 square feet/per capita (The average for the group is 1.25 square feet/per capita).
- Is one of 3 buildings without public meeting space.
- Is open an average number of hours (40 per week; group range is 21-51 hours per week, the average being 38 hours/week).

2. Relative to 8 libraries in Connecticut towns of similar wealth (including Branford, Killingworth, Litchfield, Monroe, New Fairfield, Orange, Simsbury, and Southbury; and using the statewide AENGLC Rank* ranging from 1-169, of which Chester is 48, and the others range from 44-52), the Chester Public Library:

- Is one of only two buildings not at least partially wheelchair accessible.
- Has an annual tax appropriation per capita (\$ 28.55) below both the state average\$44.45) and the wealth-group average (\$ 38.11).
- Has by far the oldest and the second smallest building with .47 square feet per capita. Chester falls below the state average (1.08 square feet per capita) and the wealth-group average (1.26 square feet per capita). The group range is from .47 square feet per capita to 1.69 square feet per capita).
- Falls at the lower end of its wealth peers in terms of library cards per capita at 0.39 (Group range is0.33 – 0.62) .

3. Relative to principal libraries in 6 Connecticut towns that are close neighbors of Chester (Deep River, Essex, Haddam, Killingworth and , Old Saybrook, Westbrook), the Chester Public Library:

- Is the smallest, but fourth wealthiest town. Its town tax appropriation per capita, at \$28.55, is the lowest of the “Neighbors” range, which goes from \$28.55 – \$69.60.
- Is open the fewest hours (Chester: 40 hours per week, neighbors range from43-62) and has nearly the circulation per capita (Chester 6.7; neighbors range from6.7-14.6).
- Resides in the smallest facility (Chester 0.47 square feet /capita; neighbors range from 1.13 – 2.76 square feet/capita).
- Has the fewest public access computers (Chester has 1, neighbors have 5-24).
- Has the fewest staff members per 1000 population at 0.47 FTE/1000 population; neighbors range from 0.56-1.1 FTE/1000 population).

¹AENGLC Rank (Adjusted Equalized Net Grand List Per Capita) is a measure of wealth calculated annually by the State Department of Education. A lower number indicates greater wealth.

²Chester is one of only 7 principal libraries in CT reporting no wheelchair accessibility.

The Long Range Planning Process

The Chester Public Library Board of Trustees began its planning process by gathering existing documents and forming a long-range planning (LRP) committee.

Planning Objectives

The long range planning process allowed the committee to

- Consider the library's needs from a long range perspective,
- Solicit input from a broad group of stakeholders,
- Build town-wide support and ownership,
- Chart a future course based on real data that protects against uninformed and impulsive decisions, and
- Align priorities with those of the Chester Plan of Conservation and Development 2009.

Funding

The Library Board sought and received a grant from Library Services Technology Assistance for \$1,500 to help cover the cost of a professional focus group facilitator, a reporter to take notes, supplies and postage for mailing of postcards and surveys as well as printing costs for the survey and plan.

Information Gathering

To inform the long-range plan, the LRP committee conducted research using the following sources:

Building Consultant's Letter (see appendix)

In early 2007, the Library hired an experienced library consultant to do an assessment of the library space. The consultant's conclusion, expressed in a letter dated 3/06/07, indicated:

- The library building is beautiful, but space is limited.
- Not fully handicapped accessible, although disabled patrons are accommodated.
- Currently staff is doing a great job of weeding.
- Adult, children's, office and basement areas can be improved somewhat by rearranging space.
- Consider planning for a new building.

The 2009 Plan of Conservation & Development

When the Library Board initiated its long range planning process in the fall of 2008, town planning (under the auspices of the Board of Planning and Zoning) was already underway. Library planners hastened to establish priorities for the library based on needs of residents and patrons and align those priorities with those of town planners. In the town planning document, the following excerpts are relevant to the library's future but to date have not been addressed or implemented:

- Need for careful, integrated planning and assessment of community goals before rushing to address individual space or organizational problems/needs
- Compelling reason for library expansion are number of volumes, services, programs; also handicapped access
- Possible options [for expansion] ... include on-site renovations and expansion, relocation to a different building, construction of a new building free-standing or shared with other town programs
- Establish town building and facilities committee to prioritize/determine funding sources for capital improvements to or for reuse of existing town building

- Work with library LRP committee to evaluate library expansion and services to promote community interaction, small town aesthetics, increased efficiency, and long-term financial viability for maintenance and sustainable access.

2009 Library Survey

The Chester Library Board of Trustees, Long Range Planning Committee and staff invited the residents of Chester to complete an electronic survey to help them understand participants' goals, priorities and interests with respect to the library and its role in the town. The online link to the survey was emailed to Chester residents and was also available on the town and library website. The survey contained 21 questions and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Paper copies of the survey were also made available to those who wished them. Residents were asked to respond by May 15, 2009. See the Appendix for the questionnaire and a brief summary of key points.

Focus Groups

The LRP committee conducted three adult focus groups (2 with mixed ages and one retiree), held at Chester Village West, and one representative group of 6th grade children at Chester Elementary School. Peg Reyer of The Chester Company, a local marketing communications firm, was the facilitator. Each adult group had a two-hour time period, and 8-12 participants. The entire 6th grade at Chester Elementary participated with great enthusiasm in their abbreviated one-hour focus group process. See the Appendix for a summary of results.

Add key findings, bulleted:

Staff Interviews

Library staff were interviewed for their perspective on short and long term library priorities and needs. Below is a summary of the feedback:

1. Efficient, organized, private staff work space
2. Comfortable reading area (the 'living room') with display space for magazines, newspapers, and current books on the main floor. Access to library catalog would be here as well. Ideally, this would include converting the fireplace to gas for added ambience and warmth.
3. Technology area with at least 2 public access computers, as well as workspace for someone with a laptop. The latter could also be quiet workspace
4. Flexible meeting/program area suitable for everything from tutoring to children's and adult programs.
5. Efficient DVD/audio display shelving in area visible to staff
6. An engaging YA area
7. Community news area
8. Children's room that is engaging, easily supervised, and, occasionally closed off.
9. Organized storage for children's program supplies, library supplies, discarded books, book sale materials
10. new floor in basement
11. new lighting on the landing
12. refinished (or new) library tables and chairs
13. a really thorough cleaning done on the bathroom

Library's Relationship to United Church of Chester

The Library's relationship with the United Church of Chester is collaborative and cordial. Many members of the Church are active users of the library and the Church has allowed use of Church facilities for programming. We share the parking lot. The Church owns the land but deeded the land to the town for as long as the building is used as a library. The building was a gift to the town. There is a reversion clause if the building is not used as a library for a period of 3 years. Ongoing conversations and attendance at Church leadership meetings concerning the future of the library at its present site have occurred.

Committee Activity

The Library Board created a long range planning committee, comprised of diverse representatives of Chester, to serve as a sounding board throughout the information-gathering and planning process. In the initial brainstorm, Christine Bradley from Connecticut Library Consortium led a two-part discussion, first about the town of Chester, i.e. its people, land, buildings, culture, etc. and then about the kind of library that would fit the town of Chester. Real affection for both the quality and uniqueness of Chester and a desire to have a library that mirrors it were consistent themes throughout the planning process. Later, members of the group and Board met to discuss the research and come up with the goals, objectives and actions for the plan.

Participants in the Library Long Range Planning Committee were: Sosse Baker, Marian Bairstow, Lary Bloom, Francine Cornaglia, Karen D'Agostino, Linda Fox, Allen Graham, James Grzybowski, Martin Heft, Peter Oliver, Tracy Quale, Peg Reyer, Terry Schreiber, Barbara Standke, Leslie Strauss and Larry Sypher.

**Purpose, Goals & Action Steps
of the CPL's Long Range Plan
(2014-2019)**

Purpose of the Long Range Plan

The Long Range Plan of the Chester Public Library provides a blueprint for the future that guides the Library Board in both its short-term and long-term decision-making. It should be both practical and visionary. While taking into account the financial realities of these economic times and the limitations inherent in the agreement with the United Church of Chester, it should nevertheless reflect the input of Chester residents *first and foremost* and call upon their innovation, can-do spirit and sense of community to make implementation of key activities happen over time.

GOAL ONE – INFRASTRUCTURE/ACCESS – Make the library accessible to all members of the community.

Making the building accessible to all residents was a consistent message throughout the research; in fact, some called it a moral imperative. Residents want change that would create more space for the library and its programs, but not go overboard or be over-consumptive. A little expansion can go a long way, they said, particularly if it creates something unique and comfortable, like a living room setting around the fireplace. They want the process to be based on expert opinion (hire experts to help us rethink the space) but then become highly collaborative – putting heads together to find a way to expand and spruce up what we have, getting local people to pitch in and donate supplies and know-how. Having considered a number of options including an annex, the library board determined the following actions:

- **Action:** Explore feasibility of expansion and accessibility options at current location.
- **Action:** Explore alternate location options to provide the best library services to the town while being financially prudent.
- **Action:** Develop fundraising infrastructure to fund the accessibility goal.

GOAL TWO – TECHNOLOGY – Embrace technology as a way to provide improved library services.

Chester's library users want the latest information technologies available to them in the library. Patrons want their public library to reflect their town, maintaining its historic quaintness and charm on the outside, but inside providing access to state-of-the-art resources that encourage learning and stimulate the intellect and curiosity of its residents. The inner workings of the CPL should be high tech and high quality

- **Action:** Increase the number of computers and computer access; continue to offer current educational online software and other resources.
- **Action:** Selectively acquire and support online resources as appropriate in new formats and to address community needs.) that keep up with the times and help address space limitations.
- **Action:** Provide professional development to librarians in the area of technology

services provided by the library.

- **Action:** Enhance awareness of activities/services/resources electronically via newsletters, social media and other options to residents.
- **Action:** Address all the IT demands around all the technology services.

GOAL THREE – HOURS AND STAFFING - Ensure staffing levels and library hours are sufficient to meet library service needs and facility safety.

When asked what change the Chester Library should make if it could make only one, residents voted most often to “increase library hours.” Given today’s hectic lifestyles, the Chester Public Library needs to expand its hours to make it easier for more residents to use and enjoy the library. In view of its intent to increase hours and possibly make other changes to programs, technology and structure, the Library Board also needs to evaluate its current staffing levels as well as their need for more education, training and work space. Residents consider the high quality of library staff a key differentiator of the Chester Public library and a strong indicator of library excellence in general.

- **Action:** Budget for staffing to ensure 2 librarians working during all open hours; increase hours of operation as budgetary increases allow.
- **Action:** Reassess staff roles and responsibilities to accommodate evolving library needs, such as programming coordination.
- **Action:** Improve the workspace of library staff.
- **Action:** Utilize volunteers to help with various library projects and tasks, embracing specialty of local residents.

GOAL FOUR - PROGRAMS – Create compelling reasons to bring people into the library with exceptional programming that targets various age groups.

Chester residents want a unique and lively selection of programs that reflect a broad range of ages, as well as community tastes and interests.

- **Action:** Allocate staff time to developing diverse and timely programming.
- **Action:** Continue to plan programs showcasing Chester residents, including Chester artists and authors, sharing their experiences, special talents or hobbies.
- **Action:** Continue popular facilitated book discussions on literature that is both challenging and entertaining.
- **Action:** Consider programs on a variety of topical subjects such as travel, financial planning, health and wellness, technology topics, how tos.
- **Action:** Enhance the library’s offerings by coordinating and partnering with other local organizations and town agencies.
- **Action:** Continue to collaborate with the Friends of the Library to enhance library programming.

GOAL FIVE - RESOURCES— Meet the needs and interests of Chester residents for informational and recreational materials.

The Chester Public Library will continue to provide access to a quality collection of books and other materials that serve the informational and recreational needs of the community as well as respond to the changing tastes and interests of Chester residents.

- **Action:** The library will strike a balance between offering popular new titles and those books that are considered classics or literature.
- **Action:** The library will study the impact of extending the loan period for books, audiobooks and DVDs.
- **Action:** The library will continue to meet the evolving needs of the town with new technology solutions for books and other resources
- **Action:** The library will continue to coordinate with Chester and Regional Schools.
- **Action:** The library will continue to offer popular museum passes in the Shoreline, Middlesex and Greater Hartford areas.
- **Action:** Continue to support popular inter-library loan system.

GOAL SIX - A PLACE TO GATHER - Make the library a place that brings people together.

Chester residents want to meet in a central location that reflects the social, cultural and intellectual benefits of living in Chester. The library can be such a place - friendly, comfortable and cozy - where they can browse, study, reflect or quickly find what they need. It should be a safe haven that makes them feel a part of the community.

- **Action:** Integrate values of history, community and culture into library decision making.
- **Action:** Establish the library as a clearinghouse of information about the community.
- **Action:** Provide space for a variety of community groups to meet, such as writers groups, business networking groups and other self-help groups as appropriate.

GOAL SEVEN – FUND-RAISING - Expand fund-raising opportunities for library resource and/or building development.

Chester Library Board of Trustees acknowledges that a library expansion and accessibility can't be fully funded by the town. The Chester Public Library cannot rely solely on taxes if it's to expand and/or enrich the library program and building facility in any substantial way. Library staff, Board, and Friends of the Library will explore opportunities for grants, program sponsorship, fundraising, and affiliate relationships to expand the amount of funding available to support library activities.

- **Action:** Establish fund-raising committee with representatives from the Board, Staff, Friends and other community members.
- **Action:** Continue to work with town officials to explore funding of library goals.
- **Action:** Continue to work the Friends of the Library and their fundraising efforts to address town programming and other library services.

GOAL EIGHT – COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS - Foster community awareness of the library's programs and services through publicity and partnerships.

Chester residents would like to be better informed about the variety of programs and services available from the library. Using various forms of communication, the library will continue keep residents up-to-date about the offerings of the library and encourage use of its services. It will also continue to foster partnerships with groups and organizations that broaden the library's reach within the community.

- **Action:** Promote library services and programs in the community through ongoing communication and cooperation with local organizational and agencies.
- **Action:** Use the town's resident e-mail list to inform the general public about the library resources and programs.
- **Action:** Budget for promotional needs of the library.
- **Action:** Create a consistent way of promoting library events so that staff, Friends and volunteers all follow the same format/steps.

Appendix

This section is for the intact storage of documents used in the information-gathering stage of the Long Range Planning process.

Survey Summary to Chester Residents:

Dear Chester Resident

As many of you may know, the Chester Board of Trustees is in the midst of its long range planning process for the Chester Public Library. Our process consists of doing research (survey, focus groups, interviews) and then development of the plan itself. With our survey and focus groups just completed, we thought we'd share some preliminary results as well as extend a huge thank you to those who participated.

Library Survey Results

The survey sample was not large but respondents were passionate about their opinions and many took the time to write very specific and articulate comments about their preferences for the library. Of the 201 respondents who took the survey (which was conducted in May):

139 took the survey electronically	62 completed a paper survey
9 were 18-30 years old	74 were 46-59 years old
50 were 31-45 years old	23 were over 70 years old
35 were 60-79 years old	

- 58.8% of respondents reported using the library twice a month or more in the past year, but 24.1% used it only a few times and 7.5% did not use it at all in that time period.
- Of all the library items available, the three used most often were adult non-fiction (76.4%), adult fiction (75.9%) and DVD's (73.8%).
- If funds were available for additional materials, the most preferred purchase would be for additional DVDs, followed by an equal number for adult-fiction and adult non-fiction books.
- Biggest obstacle to using the library was it not being open when people want to go there.
- In response to the question "If the Chester Library could only make only ONE significant change over the next few years...what would that be?" the top four choices in order were:
 1. Increasing library hours (22%) was selected MOST OFTEN
 2. Expanding book purchasing was 20%.
 3. Modify existing facility to make it more accessible was 18%
 4. Move to a different building was 11%.
- There is overwhelming interest in Saturday hours all year long. [NOTE: In response, the Library will remain open on Saturdays this summer as a trial, but will close on Tuesdays from July 7- Sept. 1] Other offerings that received high marks were more book discussion groups, more books in general, more author programs, and more speakers on special topics like

financial planning, employment, travel etc.

- As for issues, almost 2/3 of respondents want the library as the most convenient source for information (63.6%); while over half want the existing building facility improved (54.7%), followed by those who want it to ‘stay ahead of the curve’ technologically (52%). Over 51% would like to see the existing building expanded.

- There is considerable polarization among those who want to keep the historic old building as is, those who want to modify the building and those who wish to move to another building. Resolution will be challenging. Sample statements include:
 - “ We need a new library for Chester. We have outlived this one.”
 - “ We have something unique and special. Leave well enough alone!”
 - “ Don't move. There are many much bigger libraries in our area that people can go to...”
 - “ Chester Library is PERFECT as it is -- slightly dog-eared, steadfast and familiar for many generations...”
 - “ The library is not accessible, has no real rest rooms, downstairs is a fire hazard, the stairs difficult.”
 - “ I think moving is the only way to expand the materials and services of Chester Library, as well as make it accessible.”
 - “ Modify the building if necessary. Work with your neighbors (Fire House, Church, Historical Society).”
 - “ Please please please do not change our library!!!!!!”
 - “ It would be unfortunate to loose the wonderful character of the building. I'd prefer an expansion at the current site.”

- There is widespread interest in more passes for area museums and attractions available through the library. Interlibrary Loan was the most frequently used service of the library, with getting help from a librarian a close second.

Focus Groups Results

Following the survey, local resident Peg Reyer facilitated four focus groups: two mixed age groups and one retiree group held at Chester Village West and one juvenile group of 6th graders at Chester Elementary School. Here are some highlights from the focus groups:

Like Best About Chester Public Library	Like Least About Chester Public Library
<i>Knowledgeable, courteous, friendly, exceptional staff who go to the ends of the earth to get you what you want</i>	<i>Hours not intuitive; can never remember them; whenever we go to the library, it's always the wrong time</i>
<i>It's the heart of the community</i>	<i>Treacherous stairs</i>
<i>Convenient location – within walking distance to center</i>	<i>Resources, services, programs limited by size and structure</i>
<i>Architectural style and history of building</i>	<i>Only one computer</i>
<i>Charm and small town feel – ambience and personality</i>	<i>No handicapped or “stroller” access</i>
<i>Book sales</i>	<i>Library is cramped and cluttered; not good for browsing</i>
<i>Unique (not lightweight) book discussion</i>	<i>Unattractive basement</i>

<i>groups</i>	
<i>Great interlibrary loan system</i>	<i>No comfortable place to sit and read</i>
<i>Museum passes</i>	<i>Limited young adults selection</i>
<i>Children's story hour</i>	<i>No place for kids to spread out; relax, be themselves</i>

Thinking Practically – Participants were given a sum of fake money and asked to spend it on their choice of changes that were each priced comparatively. Moving to a new building was the most expensive choice, with expanding the current building a close second. In three of the four groups, more participants wanted to expand the building than move to a different building. (None of the 6th graders wanted a new location.) In one group, the number of participants who wanted a new location was tied with the number who preferred expansion. Other popular purchases were extended hours, a new computer and more books.

A Library that Says Chester – Participants want our library to reflect the town of Chester. They were quick to articulate what kind of town they live in and how that should translate to our library. The sense of town pride was evident and touching. Some examples include: unique but different; charming; comfortable chairs, fire in fireplace, all the books around me, nice librarians; artsy flair with local art; high tech and high quality; we preserve and make do in Chester – taking what is here and turning it into something; speaker series featuring Chester residents sharing their experiences; having books about Chester (it's always fun to read about a place you know so well); maintaining our incredible level of knowledge and excellence; multi-generational; awkward and funky; integrated with the Historical Society, the Land Trust and Art; having lots of educational programs to draw people in.

Most Important Messages – When asked what they would most like the library planners to know, participants said:

<p>FG 1 – Mixed <i>Be visionary; there must be change; maintain the excellence</i> <i>Pick what you want to be good at - you cannot be good at everything nor should you be. It's a shame to duplicate</i> <i>Do something to make kids become lovers of the library</i> <i>Make the library the great society leveler it once was</i> <i>Don't lose the building; let's put our heads together and find a way to expand; a little expansion can go a long way</i></p>	<p>FG 3 – Mixed <i>We need more space; rethink the space – hire experts</i> <i>Spruce up what we have; get local people to all pitch in</i> <i>Make a rational choice that envisions the next 20 years but is not over-consumptive; do some stuff now</i> <i>Create more reasons to bring people into the library</i> <i>Move the entrance; put a ramp on west side, facing parking lot</i> <i>Make this building accessible to all residents</i></p>
<p>FG 2 - 6th Graders <i>Make library bigger to fit more books</i> <i>Make library appeal to kids; have what kids like</i> <i>Involve them in the selection process</i> <i>Let them do some of the work like paint the kid areas</i></p>	<p>FG 4 – Seniors & Retirees <i>Think outside the box. Leverage schools as partners</i> <i>Change is necessary. It's unacceptable to keep it the way it is - something has to give.</i> <i>You've had focus groups, formed a committee,</i></p>

<i>Buy more computers so more people would come to do research and school work Think about all ages – not just one age group</i>	<i>now you've got to do something. Technology and marketing are key Don't lose something with a lot of Chester essence to it.</i>
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Themes etc.

As you read the above, note how certain themes seem to emerge from both survey and focus groups. Some include: the need for change now and in the future - especially expanded hours and space; keeping Chester uniqueness and quality; being resourceful and not going overboard; comfort and accessibility for all ages; and deep appreciation for library staff. The next step will be writing the plan, based on all the input. When the plan is final, it will guide Library Board decisions and growth for the foreseeable future. Again, thank you for your support and participation.

2004 Community Survey Results and Actions: The following actions were taken by the Chester Public Library following the Survey of 2004.

Survey Result	Library Action
LIBRARY COLLECTION	
34% of respondents wanted video/DVD collection expanded	Collection grows to include 1131 movies. Library is acquiring DVDs and discarding VHS format
ACCESS	
71% of respondents indicated they would use Internet to renew materials if possible. They'd like to see "all of the books programmed into a computer", "online access to the catalog", "ability to renew through voice mail or other method",	Library adopted VERSO, a web-based circulation system in 2007, that lets users search the library catalog, reserve/renew library materials and initiate Interlibrary loans from remote locations. Need to educate patrons
LIBRARY HOURS	
In 2004, the library was open 34 hours per week. Respondents indicated that the library hours were inconsistent. Should hours be expanded, lunchtime would be important to them.	The library is now open at lunchtime on Mon, Wed and Fri. Library hours were expanded to 40 per week.
ADDITIONAL SERVICES	
More museum passes	Friends of CPL have provided new passes to New Britain Museum of American Art, Connecticut River Museum and Florence Griswold Museum.
More computers	No additional public use computers added, but card catalog now accessed online and Wi-Fi throughout for laptops.

Mobile services for Chesterfields and shut-ins	The library is slowly initiating a volunteer- supported home delivery service for those either permanently or temporarily unable to visit the library.
FACILITIES	
Desired building improvements: "More space, a larger community room, ADA compliance, work study areas, room for art shows, larger children's area."	Improvements to 1907 building, basement renovated in 1960's: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wall display - lower level. ▪ New shelving - children's area ▪ New area rug in basement and wipe-off mats in upstairs foyer
Comfort - Need a "comfy place for reading".	Two upholstered chairs were added in upstairs reading area.

Building Consultant's Letter:

March 6, 2007

Linda Fox, Library Director
Chester Public Library
PO Box 310
21 W Main Street
Chester, CT 06412

Dear Linda,

I enjoyed my visit to your library. You have a beautiful building; however, you have run out of space, and your building is not fully handicapped accessible. You are doing a great job of weeding, but you are going to have to be even more ruthless. If you had the space, you probably would not weed some items, but since you have no space, you will need to weed them. I would strongly recommend that your library begin the planning process for a new building. My understanding is that the site of your 2,000 square foot building can't support an addition. There are no Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) police, but someone could sue you about the lack of access to your library. I know that you are accommodating your patrons by different methods for materials. If you don't have a written ADA policy, I would strongly recommend that you create one.



Possible rearrangements that we brained stormed at my visit are listed below:

Adult area

- Consider higher shelving for the nonprint materials.
- Get rid of the old encyclopedias and reference books that are not used.
- * • Move the young adult books to the stairwell. This might cause some supervision problems.
- * • Put current newspapers under the window.



Linda Fox, Library Director
March 6, 2007
Page 2

Office space

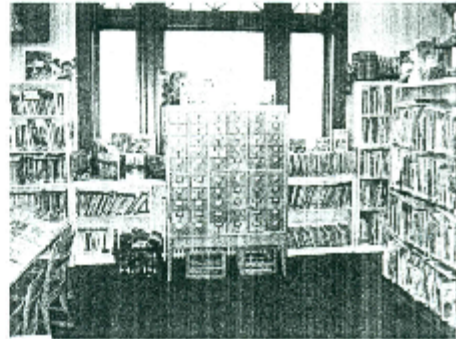
- Purchase a new desk on wheels for you. This desk should be narrower than what you have. You could also turn the desk to the side. Since you only have one staff computer, I would recommend purchasing a laptop computer for you to use on the new narrow desk.
- Drastically weed the reference collection of books that you do not use.
- Possibly stack the file cabinets or put some of this information in the lockable file cabinet downstairs.



Office space

Children's area

- Keep as much floor space open so the children can use the floor.
- Replace the large slant table with two smaller slant tables. One single-faced table would go in front of the radiator where you presently have the card catalog, which will be closed soon, and the other 3-4' foot double-faced table would go where the existing table is located.
- Purchase one three-high shelving unit possibly on wheels (3' wide) to go next to the smaller table.



Children's area

Basement area

- * Purchase slatwall for the pillars for display.
- * Consider book trucks for shelving a collection. Trucks are easy to move when you use this area for meetings.

Please feel free to contact me at 1-800-253-7944, ext. 306 or mjensen@eslib.org, if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Mary Louise Jensen
Building Consultant

Staff Interviews:

1. PATTY PETRUS, Childrens' Librarian, 25 years at the library

Main duties: Childrens' program planning, book repairs, shares in circulation desk, shelving, and reference questions

2. PAM LARSON, Assistant librarian, 12 years at the library

Main duties: Interlibrary loans, some film purchases, shares other duties

3. LEIGH BASILONE, Circulation Assistant, 2 1/2 years

Main duties: overdue materials collections, shares other duties

4. LINDA FOX, Librarian Director, 7 years

Main duties: Running the library--board sets policies, she implements them--selects the collection, hires staff, works at the desk, prepares the budget, plans adult programming, public relations, liaison to the Friends

QUESTION 1: What is the process you use to determine which books, DVD's, etc. to select for the library? How do you weed out books?

1. (PP) Linda choses but she gives recommendations. She helps with weeding out based on age of book and its circulation record. Space is the biggest issue.
2. (PL)Linda selects, keeps notes on patrons' requests. She reads many movie reviews and hears patrons' requests. Picks up foreign films and previously viewed at Hollywood Video. Weeding is a collaborative effort.
3. (LB) Same, leaves notes for Linda
4. (LF)Two prong--reads reviews, based on collective needs and desires of community and anticipating what they will want. Requests.

Shelf space is a huge factor, budget for books is adequate. If fiction and not read in last 3 years it goes, we have a more current library than many because if this. Most go to the book sale. Different standards for different collections, some need to be constantly updated, ie, medical information. Interlibrary loan is always available.

QUESTION 2: WHAT CHANGES DO YOU THINK SHOULD BE MADE TO THE LIBRARY'S COLLECTIONS TO MAKE THEM MORE RESPONSIVE TO THE NEEDS/DESIRES OF LIBRARY PATRONS?

1. Book series for kids, and if Patty requests them Linda will get them.

2. None, really. ILL fills that need. If there are 2 or more requests for the same item it means we should buy it, usually.

3. Get rid of videos and use the space for other things. They don't go out. They are being weeded now. It would be nice to get some video sets replaced on DVD, but not a priority. It would be great to have another computer and a place to sit while going through the catalogue at the computer. Also a quiet place to sit and read.

4. Find a way to expand offerings of recorded books. There are fewer available as the Middletown Service Center had its budget cut.

Growing need for DVD's and getting rid of videos for the space.

QUESTION 3: SPECIFICALLY, WHAT KIND OF PROGRAMS SHOULD CPL INVEST IN TO INCREASE LIBRARY USAGE AMONG TOWN RESIDENTS?

1. Love to see children's' authors as speakers--expensive. A better storage place for materials and a place for children to wash their hands, etc. More programs to increase circulation--music, authors.

2. Magazine selection could be better--fine arts, antiques, home and cooking. Movies at the library with discussions, more book discussions.

3. More book discussions, more for teens to attract them.

4. Programs, people want more. Perhaps connect with other groups already doing programs. Inviting more local authors to speak.

Space and accessibility is the problem. Expansion of some sort is the only real solution.

QUESTION 4: WHAT KIND OF TRAINING WOULD HELP YOU DO YOUR JOB EVEN BETTER IN THE NEXT 5 YEARS?

1. There are many opportunities---seminars, etc. but it is difficult with the coverage situation. Trading off is hard, especially since I also have another job. There is a roundtable for librarians, too.

2. Computer technology, keeping up with ILL, more computers, had attended round table discussions but coverage is the obstacle.

3. None in particular.

4. Training on writing budgets. No past experience in this area. For example, there is no budget for maintenance in the library, how to include this? Management training.

The state offers great programs but there is no coverage for time off.

QUESTION 5: IN YOUR MIND, WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT CHANGE THE LIBRARY CAN MAKE TO POSITION ITSELF FOR THE FUTURE? WHAT WOULD BE YOUR TOP PRIORITY FOR CHANGE?

1. Expansion. A new library is a possibility but everyone loves this building. Handicapped access.

2. Technology. Services to the community may not be books in the future. Gathering people together to share programs.

Loves this library but it would be wonderful to have more meeting room and computers. Does not want a new building.

3. If we doubled the size it would be phenomenally beneficial. Linda needs space for an office, a real desk, filing cabinets. A bathroom that's not off the staff's personal space.

4. Access in every way. Physical--open access to everyone. Hours--expanded to meet the needs of the community. Space allocation to allow librarians to get their work done. A beautiful building on the outside but inside is a mishmash of donated furniture, mismatched.

There should be a comfy feeling when people walk in--a community living room by the fire place. A new physical plant eventually needed. In the meantime, we can make changes where we are now. The present space can be made more workable but in the long run--who is going to decide this?

Letters from United Church:

The United Church of Chester
United Church of Christ



Ms. Terry Schreiber
Chm. Chester Library Board of Directors
21 West Main St.
Chester, Ct. 06412

Dear Terry:

July 11, 2009

At the last meeting of the Board of Trustees of the United Church of Chester The possibility of Library expansion was discussed. It was mentioned that at some of the focus groups held by the Library Planning Task Force it was suggested that the Church had indicated that it was willing to discuss the use of some of the church property for possible library expansion.

The Board requested that I write you, as Chairman of the Board, to indicate that at a meeting in June 2007 the Board clearly stated that the Church would not approve the use of any additional Church land for library purposes. I enclose a copy of a letter from the Chair of the Board to Sharon Cromwell, Chair of the Library Board to that effect.

The Board of Trustees felt it was important to repeat this position before any misunderstandings occur during your Boards deliberations about possible expansion.

If you have any questions concerning this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Cliff Vermilya, Chair, Board of Trustees

29 West Main Street • P.O. Box 383 • Chester, Connecticut 06412-0383
Phone (860) 526-2697 • email: unitedchester@sbcglobal.net

August 31, 2007

Sharon Cromwell, Chairman
Chester Public Library
21 West Main Street
Chester, CT 06412

Re: Library Expansion

Dear Ms. Cromwell:

The United Church of Chester's Board of Trustees met with representatives from the Chester Public Library's Board of Directors on two occasions in 2006 and 2007 to discuss the Library's future plans. At our June 2007 meeting, we were asked to decide whether the Church would explore the option of library expansion on the present site and whether the Church would like to see plans for such an expansion.

After discussion of these issues, the Board of Trustees has decided that we are not interested in any library expansion that would require the use of any of the Church's land.

I hope that our decision is useful to your Board of Directors as you consider future options.

Very truly yours,

Robert T. Rimmer, Chairman
United Church of Chester
Board of Trustees