

## BPL Strategic Plan 2023-2028

### Executive Summary

Bridgton Public Library aspires to be the model for a dynamic rural library focused on personalized library services and its role as a cultural/intellectual center for a diverse community. To make this real, we needed to identify the services we will provide and ensure both our space and financial position can support them. The Board of Trustees, over a four year period, have gathered data on usage over time as well as input from library staff. In early 2023 the decision was made to engage an architectural firm, Simons Architects, to produce a programming study to identify programs and services, assess the space available, and provide recommendations on space and use in one consolidated report.

This Strategic Plan (2023-2028) provides a guide, ensuring a focused vision and mission are made operational by a professional staff, supported by a dedicated Board of Trustees with robust community financial support.

### Data Collection Methods (2017-2023)

- community surveys
- stakeholder surveys
- community feedback
- stakeholder focus groups
- Comparative data

### Strategic Initiatives identified

- Literacy
- Lifelong Learning
- Digital Equity

### Resources needed

- ★ Collections
- ★ Programs (Building Based)
- ★ Community Outreach
- ★ Technology
- ★ Building
- ★ Financial Resources

The resulting Action Plan incorporates the strategic initiatives that are the heart of this work: Literacy, Lifelong Learning, and Digital Equity. These are supported by our Collections, Programs (Building Based), Community Outreach, and Technology. This plan ensures that our services can be supported by our resources.

**Vision**

Bridgton Public Library aspires to be the model for a dynamic rural library focused on personalized library services and its role as a cultural/intellectual center for a diverse community.

**Mission**

The Bridgton Public Library's primary purpose is to serve the community as its information and cultural center. It endeavors to provide access to educational, informational, and recreational resources in a friendly, safe atmosphere, and to be responsive to the changing needs of the community.

**Values**

Bridgton Public Library reflects the community it serves. Our values are evident in the contents of the collections, the services that are offered, and the staff that are selected to meet the needs of all people who walk through our doors. They are also embodied in the Board of Trustees. The Board dedicates hundreds of volunteer hours each year to make sure the library is well-run, and that the community is well served. While each Board member gives their time for different reasons, there are some common ideals that hold them all together.

The Library is an institution that models civility and honors choice. The staff is always welcoming and there to help everyone. We are all lifelong learners. The Library is a center and anchor in the community, that has been here for years and will be here for years to come. It is our role to bring the best things from our past into the future. And that includes providing books, in whatever form, for people who just love reading.

**Introduction**

The Bridgton Public Library's transition from an institution focused on storing and lending out books and materials to a service-oriented community resource has been a twenty plus year journey. Over this time the library has experienced significant changes in the nature and scope of the services offered to the greater Bridgton community. The strength of the library depends on a focused vision and mission delivered by a professional staff supported by a dedicated Board of Trustees with robust community financial support.

A strategic plan is a blueprint designed to guide alignment of the library's resources toward identified goals. As a guiding document, the plan requires a regular review of progress toward meeting the goals. The plan is a "living document" that will evolve as goals and objectives are met. By meeting the goals we have an impact in our community. This plan allows for adjustments and updates in the specific goals and action items needed to support the library's vision and mission.

The following plan is divided into three sections: Library Services, Building, and Financial Planning. The Action Plan then pulls these three sections together to describe how the Bridgton Public Library should move forward.

**Library Services****Introduction**

Bridgton Public Library serves the community and is also an active member of the community. We have a Board of Trustees that oversees policies and finances. We have a staff of professionals who are here to help all library users find the information they need in a welcoming place. We have a community of

library users, all of whom are unique individuals with their own interests and personal relationships in the community.

Community engagement is at the heart of our work. Without people to serve we are a building with some equipment and books sitting on shelves. Listening to what people need takes time and thought. When you come from the place of thinking, "How is this need related to what libraries do," it has been surprising how many of the needs are actually what we should and can do. As a result, we have started several special collections, fostered a homeschool group, developed a new staff position, re-organized our collections, fully implemented a purchase suggestion model for new materials, built strong partnerships with local agencies and organizations, and re-designed our website and online catalog for easier use. We engage the community every day in our operations, programs, and services design.

We cooperate with area public libraries, including Fryeburg, Lovell, and Denmark, to provide shared programs for our communities. We have recently created a library consortium that includes Harrison, Naples, Casco, and Raymond to share our collections across these five communities. We all work together to provide programs and services, each within our limited hours and budgets, to meet the needs of all of these residents. Our programs and schedules are specifically designed to make sure residents have access to a local library and community program opportunities. By building these relationships over time, we have strengthened the local library sector and have expanded our services to people who live in the greater Bridgton area with minimal duplication and increased access to programs and resources. A healthy library sector is a benefit to all of the area residents.

We aspire to be the model for a dynamic rural library focused on personalized library services and its role as a cultural/intellectual center for a diverse community. When thinking about rural library services we are focused on three core priorities: Literacy, Lifelong Learning, and Digital Equity. All of our programs and services flow from these main categories. The outcomes and resources for providing these core services are detailed in the Strategic Plan Framework attached.

### **Collections**

We currently have 28,500 physical circulating items, including the following materials: books, large print books, audiobooks, DVDs, magazines, activity kits, special items, and museum and park passes. We have materials for infants, children, teens, and adults. Our collections are all monitored for use, and items that are not circulated are removed from the collection in a regular cycle.

We have a strong collection development policy that ensures our collection is a reflection of our community members. Library users request new materials through our purchase suggestion system. While we are not able to add every item requested, due to budget and space constraints, we use the InterLibrary Loan (ILL) system provided by the Maine State Library as needed. If there is a gap in collection development, the staff uses professional recommendations to ensure our whole collection is diverse and current.

Our collection maintenance and development policies and procedures provide us with opportunities for continuous conversation with community members on the information resources they need. The creation of a local library consortium will increase our local access to materials in our collections and expand the materials available to all of our library members. This is a strategic opportunity to broaden our collections, increase our library users, and increase our circulation of many different items throughout the communities we serve.

### **Programs (Building Based)**

With the pandemic came a re-design of our programs to better meet the needs of our library users. When we were not able to have the public in our building, we had to think about which existing weekly group activities we would be able to keep and which would need to be postponed. At this time, we introduced standing programs that were always available during our hours of operation (Legos, scavenger hunts, interactive bulletin boards, and coloring pages). We also created grab-and-go activities for homeschoolers specifically (STEAM and Culture-themed), as well as storytime crafts with recommended reading lists for parents to take home.

As operating restrictions have lifted, we found that the community now relies on having these activities always available to them. With the lifting of all restrictions, we re-introduced Storytime and in-person craft workshops. We have also added poetry writing and author readings to our in-person programs. Our book discussion groups continued by Zoom virtual conferencing during the pandemic, and are now available as a hybrid program (in-person and virtual attendance available). We have added one-on-one technology help and are building partnerships with the National Digital Equity Center to provide introductory workshops and computer and technology training.

Recognizing that traditional programming does not always meet the needs of our library users, we have been very thoughtful in what we offer here in our building. Our focus is on literacy, community building, creative interactions, and digital equity. Our scheduled workshops and events have not recovered their pre-pandemic numbers, for several reasons, but our always-available activities are very successful.

The one exception to this is Storytime, which is very successful and provides an anchor for other programs. Parents and caregivers often have more than one child, and providing activities for different interests and ages concurrently has increased our participation in all associated programs.

We are able to leverage our Storytime success because we have flexible staffing. We had an opportunity to develop an Outreach Coordinator position when we had a resignation from Youth Services. The remaining staff can be at both our Main Circulation Desk and our Youth Services Desk, instead of having only one staff person assigned. As a result, we can schedule the bulk of our staff in Youth Services to provide assistance to parents and caregivers for several concurrent activities around Storytime. Having multiple staff people building relationships with families and caregivers provides us with continuous opportunities to add programs, services, and materials to our library offerings.

Our collections, programs, and services are all limited by the amount of space we have available. But, in thinking of ways to reach people who are not currently using the library we have also been able to expand our programs and services beyond our walls. When the Board agreed to create the Outreach Coordinator position here at our small and rural library, it opened many possibilities to provide literacy, lifelong learning, and digital equity programs and services in new ways.

### **Community Outreach**

Our Outreach Coordinator creates and implements a community outreach plan to reach diverse populations, coordinates homebound delivery programs, participates in collaborative local groups, develops educational materials, and oversees school outreach programs. These each offer opportunities for the library to provide literacy and digital equity programs and services in locations outside of the building, as well as promote our in-building offerings to those who have not yet used the library.

We have several opportunities to expand our collections and circulation at other locations, such as assisted living facilities. We will be establishing a home delivery service for those who have existing library accounts. We are also developing our partnerships with the local schools, and hope to continue to expand the number of library users. We will continue to build on the success of the Little Free Libraries throughout Bridgton, and will continue to reach out to other community groups offering services to high-needs populations for literacy assistance. Looking ahead, we will be working to implement state-wide broadband and technology initiatives at the local level to improve rural digital equity, or access and use of internet and computer technologies.

As a local nonprofit we are able to go beyond traditional library services and increase our visibility in the community. As a fiscal sponsor we support existing and new community-building, literacy, and educational efforts delivered by others, increasing our partnerships and relationships. With a Library Director and an Outreach Coordinator who are actively involved in strategic groups and community meetings, we are uniquely positioned to develop breadth and depth of relationships. With a dedicated Board of Trustees and Friends of the Library group, we also have extensive ties with other community groups through their work.

### **Technology**

Our current technology includes infrastructure (broadband connection, wireless network, wired network), equipment (desktop computers, Chromebooks), and programs (one-on-one technology help, partnered workshops, online resources). We provide access, through the Maine State Library, to downloadable audiobooks and ebooks and DigitalMaine (online database of magazines, newspapers, and online learning opportunities). We have an online catalog that is being integrated into a consortium catalog to improve access to residents in other towns, and will eventually be integrated into the state-wide system. We have a current website that allows us to keep the public informed of events and activities through multiple social media streams, including FaceBook and Instagram.

Our technology strategies are flexible and focused. We have expanded and improved our infrastructure, updated our equipment, promoted our online resources, and used our online presence to promote our events and activities.

We have an opportunity to promote broadband access and provide computer training through several partnerships. As a member of the state-wide Digital Inclusion Task Force that submitted the federal report for Broadband Equity Access Deployment funding, we will provide the support for local residents, in partnership with Greater Portland Council of Governments and the National Digital Equity Center. This is a long-term strategic plan that requires equipment and staff.

Our membership in the newly-formed consortium places us in a position to offer technical assistance to other local libraries and advocate for resources at the county, state, and federal levels. By having our Technology Strategic Action Plan in place, we are able to advocate for local libraries at the county, state, and federal levels to help them build their infrastructure and improve their resources.

### **Strategic Initiatives**

Over the past five years we have identified the following strategic priorities to guide our programs and services: Literacy, Lifelong Learning, and Digital Equity.

#### ***Literacy***

- Skill Building Collection- This collection includes activity kits with new games and activities for improving fine motor skills, identifying and dealing with emotions, and building social behavior awareness for children. The books added to our collections have more white space, more pictures, and fewer words per page than traditional books and are on topics kids have been asking about at our circulation desks over the past six months or so. We have also added picture books with built-in audio recordings so that children can listen to the words while looking at the books. This initiative incorporates Collections, Programs (Building Based), Community Outreach, and Technology.
- Homeschool Resources- This collection includes primary and secondary educational resources for all education levels; a well-maintained juvenile non-fiction section; educational activity kits that include books, media, and educational games; a dedicated storytime with literacy and stem activities available for multiple-aged children; and technology available for long-term checkout. This initiative incorporates Collections, Programs (Building Based), and Technology.
- Little Free Libraries- This extension of our regular circulating collections requires maintaining and re-stocking Little Free Libraries in Bridgton and outlying communities with our community partners. This coordinated effort includes books that have been donated to the library, which are then sorted into categories by our staff and the Friends of the Library to cover a wide variety of interests and reading levels. In partnership with the Rotary Club and local public libraries in outlying communities, Little Free Libraries are being maintained and stocked by our staff if they are not self-sustaining. This initiative incorporates Collections and Community Outreach.

***Lifelong Learning***

- Learning Communities- The Library is in a unique position to offer assistance and support to area businesses and nonprofits. Working with the Chamber of Commerce and local nonprofit leaders the Library can offer space for sector-specific workshops, technology support and assistance, peer-review for grants and applications, and continue partnerships with the Maine Philanthropy Center and Greater Portland Council of Governments. This initiative incorporates Collections, Programs (Building Based), Community Outreach, and Technology.
- Teen Collections- It is especially critical to support literacy, provide workforce development and leadership opportunities, provide access to technology, and focus on community-defined programs. The largest factor in our library use is access to transportation, particularly for this group, so re-designing our services to meet people where they are is vital to the success of this strategic initiative. This initiative incorporates Collections, Programs (Building Based), Community Outreach, and Technology.

***Digital Equity***

- Broadband Advocacy- The lack of fast, reliable, and affordable broadband is a major problem in rural, suburban, and urban America. Issues of digital inclusion and accessibility have exacerbated the digital divide, leaving millions of Americans unable to use technology to improve their lives. The Bridgton Public Library has been working to get the word out that federal funding is available for building the broadband infrastructure here in our area and also available to help make these internet connections affordable to households through the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). We will continue to provide one-on-one application assistance for the ACP as well as work with our Digital Inclusion Coalition partners. This initiative incorporates Programs (Building Based), Community Outreach, and Technology.
- Technology Help- The Library has a unique role in our community to support people who have not historically used technology so they can access online government, health, and financial services. Our partnerships with the Bridgton Community Center and the National Digital Equity Center have expanded our offerings and our community reach. We will continue to provide one-on-one assistance, curate online learning resources, and begin long-term lending of Chromebooks for people to try at home before they purchase. This initiative incorporates Collections, Programs (Building Based), Community Outreach, and Technology.

## **Building**

### **Introduction**

In many ways the history of libraries has been a history of buildings. Libraries were physical locations that housed a valuable literary, cultural, and historical asset – the written word. One went to the library to view and study the collection. With the advent of the “public” library a citizen was able to access information usually reserved for the elite. The library building was a vital resource for communities. The physical building was a beacon and a haven for individual growth and community identity.

As communities evolved, library buildings mirrored the changes. Central libraries grew to accommodate the exponential growth in the written word and other materials such as video. Urban communities began to build neighborhood libraries and rural libraries expanded their hours of operations.

The current iteration of library buildings reflects a significant shift in mission. For prior generations libraries were repositories of physical materials. The safely stored materials were made available either at the library building or lent out. The shift to adding services started slowly -- some perceived the shift as diluting resources from the central mission. Adding to the layers of mission was the growth of technology.

Library buildings were asked to accommodate these fast-moving trends of expanded services and technology. For the most part the physical space was not designed for the shifts in mission. Designing space to reflect the move from lending library to full-service library was a challenge.

The current main building was completed in 1913. An addition was added in 1995. The outdoor courtyard was completed in 2012. The original building has 3,855 square feet of interior space. The addition added 1,970 square feet. The 1993 addition increased office space, added a meeting room, and installed an elevator. The change of location of the circulation desk allowed for additional bookshelf space.

The current building has had several utility upgrades and interior space improvements. In addition to space for library materials the library also has a meeting/staff room, two bathrooms (one public), a reading room, a resource room, a shared staff office, and individual study carrels. It has many attributes we value.

- The main building is a historical building
- The building is in the heart of Bridgton
- The interior of the main building has wonderful woodwork
- The envelope (roof and windows) has been recently upgraded
- The courtyard is a Main Street respite with trees and seasonal outside seating

### **Needs Assessment**

In 2023 the Board of Trustees hired Simons Architects to complete a Programming Report, including a needs analysis of space to accommodate existing and future programs and services. This process uncovered the library’s most essential needs, both current and 25 years into the future. This planning study concluded that a renovation of the original building coupled with a new addition is necessary for the library to continue to serve its community. With our increased traffic flow and public use, our building should have the following:



- Larger public meeting space
- Separate teen library space, separate from children's area
- Larger open area in front of both circulation desks
- Expanded building entry for safety and more welcoming feeling
- More staff work space
- Staff private office space
- Bookshelves should be out of the basement, prone to groundwater issues
- More public restrooms

This planning study includes a full description of the data collection methods, overview of the complete property, and a concept design to meet the needs that have been identified. A new addition of this magnitude would help library staff work more efficiently, address safety and security concerns, and provide appropriate spaces for all members of the greater Bridgton area for many years to come.

## Financial Planning

### Introduction

The Board of Trustees has policies and procedures in place for full compliance with all laws and recommended accounting practices. These include an Investment Policy for our endowment as well as for other restricted funds. Over the past twenty years the operating budgets have been balanced. The Board of Trustees has made sure the building is well maintained and that major capital projects have been funded without incurring debt. The balance sheet shows a healthy asset balance without debt. A significant trend has been the increase in the cost of staff, though the percentage of the total budget spent on staff remains steady. The library is committed to a professional staff that reflects the mission of serving as a vital community resource.

Bridgton Public Library is part of a community of nonprofits of many serving the greater Bridgton area. With donations and foundation grants making up an estimated 35% of our annual budget, we need to be mindful of limited donor pools and increasing costs for building maintenance, staff salaries, and technology. Our financial health is dependent on not only our governance and administration but also on the strategic health of surrounding nonprofits who are looking to many of the same local donors for funding. Supporting each other through strategic partnership increases program opportunities and minimizes duplication, as well.

### Current

In fiscal year 2023-24 the operating budget (\$294,800) has four major income sources (percent of income): town support (32%), annual fund giving (18%), endowment draw (18%), 4 on the 4<sup>th</sup> Road Race (13%). The remainder comes from a series of grants, Friends of the Library, and other miscellaneous sources. On the expense side the major lines are staff compensation (60%), maintenance/utilities (22%), library materials/programs/technology (9%), and other (9%).

While we budget for an annual endowment withdrawal of up to 5% of the corpus over a three year average if needed, we do not always draw the maximum amount. The library's operations have not required the full amount allowed for the past 3 years, which has allowed for capital repairs and improvements to be completed without any short- or long-term debt. Operations and capital repairs are separate for accounting purposes as per policy.

The current balance sheet (6/30/2023) shows a net worth of \$2,528,924. There is no long-term debt.

The library has an active and knowledgeable Board of Trustees that works closely with the Library Director to develop a carefully structured budgeting process. The full board is continually informed on all financial matters and any substantial issues that occur during a fiscal year are brought to the attention of the finance committee and the full board. An accounting firm provides an annual compiled financial statement of position and files our organization's 990 tax forms at the end of each fiscal year.

The recent strength of the library's yearly economic landscape has drawn attention to the need to address potential long-term financial trends. On the income side, 40% of our annual income is voluntary.

The annual fund and the road race proceeds are dependent on the goodwill of others. On the expense side, the cost of human resources is growing at a faster rate than other expense lines. A five-year financial projection clearly points to a need to carefully balance the desire to grow with available resources.

**Strategic Initiatives**

- Develop a financial plan for staff recruitment and retention
- Build a “rainy day” fund to fund operations in place of an annual endowment withdrawal
- Annually assess if we have significant resources to manage a major change in either income or expense

**Appendix:**

- Past three years of operating budgets (start/end)
- Past three years balance sheets
- Past three years endowment fund results (compressed) Dated at end of fiscal years.
- Operating budget projections for the next five years.