

Transcend, Transform, and Deliver:
A Strategic Plan for the Westport Public
Library
2010 -2013

Adopted by the Library Board of Trustees September 15, 2010

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### President's Letter

"Open to All."

This short phrase is inscribed on the old Westport Public Library building, which has anchored our downtown since 1908.

You can tell a lot about an institution by the words it chooses to etch on its public face. "Equal Justice under Law," reads the welcoming inscription on the imposing Supreme Court building in Washington. The sentence chiseled into the James Farley Post Office in New York City promises: "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds."

But "Open to All," isn't merely a promise, or a slogan. It's a mission statement that signifies what libraries are all about – and what your Library in particular is all about. "Open to All" has several meanings.

The Library is Open to All users. The collection, and our services and programs are designed to appeal to all members of our community, from toddlers to retirees -- regardless of their ability to pay.

The Library is Open to All ideas and points of view. Historically, those who house, lend and care for books have been at the forefront of defending and promoting free expression. Today, the library serves as a hub for community discussion and debate, an incubator for ideas, a place where anyone can pursue an interest in practically any topic.

The Library is Open to All uses. Depending on the time of day, the Westport Public Library can be a movie theater, a concert hall, a provider of internet service, a meeting place for businesspeople, a study hall for high school students, a resource for jobseekers, a haven for readers, and a resource for fans of all types of media – from podcasts to DVDs.

The Library is Open to All technologies. In their day, books, magazines, and newspapers were disruptive technologies. As information is packaged in new formats – videocassettes, books on tape, electronic databases, the Internet, e-books, podcast – the Library deploys resources to ensure that users can access it.

So it's in this spirit of remaining Open to All – in these many meanings – that we offer this strategic plan. Many people tend to think of libraries as places where objects and ideas are preserved. But to serve all the public's needs in the 21st century, libraries must become more dynamic – they must transcend their traditional roles, transform their physical, technological and human resources, and deliver services and experiences to a broad audience of users.

The old Westport Public Library building now serves a different function than imagined when Morris Jesup provided funds for its construction in the first decade of the 20th century. But it still stands as an anchor at the axis of downtown Westport, and as testimony to the enduring role of the library at the center of the town's social and civic life. This plan has been the product of several years of thought, discussion, debate, research, and analysis. It represents the efforts of the library's staff, leadership, and Trustees to ensure that our community can continue to rely on this institution for the next century. It represents our thinking on how we can provide the service we've come to expect, grow and evolve into an even more effective institution, and anticipate the bewildering, exciting changes that affect the way we communicate, learn, and interact – on how the Library can remain Open to All.

Eduardo Andrade, President Library Board of Trustees

## Planning for the Future

Like most successful organizations, the Westport Public Library is committed to strategic planning to guide its thinking about the future and assist in the effective allocation of resources.

The rapid pace of today's world has shortened the planning cycle so that we now take a step back every three years to assess our progress, obtain feedback from the community, and identify priorities for the next planning cycle. Our success in using our previous plans to guide our organizational growth inspired us to undertake this most recent planning effort over the last 6 months.

Library Trustees, the Friends of the Library, staff, and members of the community participated in the discussions that resulted in this plan. More than 161 people attended a focus group or town meeting to share their ideas for the library's future and another 429 Westporters and other library users completed an online survey, providing us with valuable feedback about the library's success in meeting their needs.

But beyond the survey and focus group results, the Westport Library's success can be measured in many ways. The Library's success in attracting the community has created challenges that must be addressed in this plan.

The Library's expanding array of stimulating and engaging public programs continues to attract an ever-increasing number of users. As a result, the library often turns away people from these valuable opportunities for civic engagement. Westporters seeking places in the library for quiet study or conversation find it difficult at times to find seating that is both comfortable and suitable for their work. Every day the Westport Public Library turns people away because its building is unable to support the library services the community wants and deserves. Programs are often filled to capacity and seats for reading and study are in short supply.

In addition to turning users away, the library faces the prospects of users turning away from it. Physical infrastructure isn't the only challenge. The Library needs to expand its technological footprint to support the creation of digital content and accommodate new methods of information transfer, or it faces the prospect of failing to meet the community's needs. For now and for the foreseeable future, the library will need to balance its print collection with digital content in a manner that enables its customers to obtain the reading and information resources they need.

The Board of Trustees and Planning Committee met on several occasions during this planning process to determine how the library could best respond to the community and live up to its reputation as one of the community's most valued civic resources.

The discussion revolved around the library's challenge to deliver high quality service given the current facility constraints and the need to increase and reassign space to meet the demands of

a growing population of users. The need is urgent and the demand in Westport is great for a library that can support 21<sup>st</sup> century service.

After much debate and weighing the pros and cons of investing in new and different space versus maintaining the status quo, the Board of Trustees has decided to proceed with the library's Transformation Project, a visionary plan for creating new and inspiring spaces that will delight the community and re-imagine the library for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Board understands that taking no action to improve and enhance the library's existing space jeopardizes its long-term future and inhibits its ability to meet the community's needs.

The Transformation Project is focused on smart growth for the library. It recognizes that an investment in the library is a "public good" that touches people in the community at every age, perhaps more so than any other publicly funded institution in town. An investment in the library is an investment in the future social, economic, and civic health of the community.

# Understanding the Community We Serve

We learned a great deal from our customers as a result of our focus groups, town meeting and survey. We heard about the need to:

- renew and refresh the library's space so it better meets customer needs
- maintain collections with more new material on the shelves and strong print, media, and digital collections
- respond more actively to the needs of younger residents as well as others in Westport who
  may not now actively use the library
- strengthen the role of the library as the cultural and intellectual heart of the community and the civic anchor for downtown Westport
- increase access to technology, meeting and quiet study space
- play a leading role in connecting residents with each other as well as other organizations in town
- increase awareness of the library's mission, collection, programs and facility needs

### Our Vision for the Future

#### We help you learn and grow.

You never stop learning. The library's public programs, state of the art content, and innovative services help you realize your potential at all stages of life. Come explore all that we have to offer. The library is your learning partner.

### • We build community and social engagement.

Today's world is complicated. We bring people together in a safe and welcoming environment to explore new ideas, discuss complicated issues and promote civic engagement. Our democracy requires informed participants. Your library helps you understand and participate in building a better future.

#### • We make Westport a better place to live.

Your library, your community. The library is an essential part of your life, the place you turn to when you need information to make a decision, need something to read, or want a place for quiet reflection. Your library is a sanctuary, welcoming to all.

## Our Values, Our Commitment to You

- Responsive, personal service based on your needs and interests.
- Information, facilities, and resources for all.
- Continuous innovation and improvement.
- Customer service that ensures you get what you want, when you need it.
- Staff who love their work and are eager to learn.

# Strategic Outcomes: What We Want to Achieve with This Plan

The challenges we face represent a significant moment and opportunity in the history of our town, and of our library -- to be part of the conversation about information, content and community. We will reach our planned outcome by pursuing three objectives.

- **Objective 1** Develop new service models that **transcend** the traditional role of libraries.
- **Objective 2 Transform** the Westport Public Library to meet the evolving and changing needs of its community and enhance its ability to lead and respond to the dynamic changes in the way information is acquired, consumed, and delivered.
- **Objective 3 Deliver** convenient, continuous, innovative customer focused library service during the library's transformation project.

# Transcend, Transform, and Deliver

Objective 1:	Develop new service models that <b>transcend</b> the traditional role of libraries.		
Goal 1:	Secure the place of the library as an incubator for thoughts and ideas, a plathat brings people together and facilitates civic engagement		
Goal 2:	Promote the library as the place for lifelong learning and personal growth		
Goal 3:	Implement new methods for delivering content and collection		
Goal 4:	Deliver convenient and innovative library services that respond to changir community needs		
Goal 5:	Create a premier digital library that harnesses the power of information technology to deliver great online library service		
Goal 6:	Provide a rich and interactive library experience to meet the needs of underserved segments of the community		
Goal 7:	Create a secure financial future for the Westport Public Library		
Goal 8:	Devise and adopt new metrics to evaluate the Library's success and ensure successful outcomes		
Objective 2:	<b>Transform</b> the Westport Public Library to meet the evolving and changing needs of its community and enhance its ability to lead and respond to the dynamic changes in the way information is acquired, consumed, and delivered.		
Goal 1:	Build an inspiring and functional library that enables the community to		

experience the public library of the future

fundraising success for the Transformation project Goal 3: Employ innovative techniques to ensure meaningful and continuous communication about the Transformation Project to build enthusiasm and involvement among Westporters Goal 4: **Secure funding for the Transformation Project** Goal 5: Create a transparent process that engages the community in planning for the new library and provides for accountability in the use of the Transformation project funds **Deliver** convenient, continuous, innovative customer focused library **Objective 3:** service during the library's transformation project Goal 1: Develop and implement a plan to provide uninterrupted and high quality library service during the Transformation Project

Align the library's organizational and governance structures to ensure

Goal 2:

Goal 2:

Adopt new services and programs in the temporary facilities in order to

Goal 3: Create and model a new and temporary staffing plan, service standards, position expectations, and skills training needed to complete the library transformation

# **Progress Indicators**

- 1) The community rallies around the Transformation Project and provides the political and financial support needed to accomplish physical improvements.
- 2) The number of visitors turned away from the library decreases.
- 3) The Westport Public Library continues to be at the top of state, regional and national rankings for its commitment to delivering premier customer service.
- 4) The library is recognized as the civic anchor of downtown, a partner with local businesses, and a driver of the town's economic vitality.
- 5) All segments of the community are engaged in the library with increased use by teens and 20-35 year olds.
- 6) Library use continues to grow according to agreed upon traditional and new metrics.
- 7) Westport residents rank the library as one of the top three community assets.
- 8) There is minimal interruption in library service during the Transformation project.
- 9) The Transformation Project is completed on time and on budget.

## Appendix: The Needs Assessment Process - Summary

During February and March 2010, the Westport Public Library engaged members of the community through a series of focus groups, a Community Conversation or town meeting and a user survey to find out what it needed to do to identify changing needs of community members and to respond with a new strategic plan of service for the library. <sup>1</sup>

During the process, the library learned, among other things, that residents and users:

- Love and praise the library and staff for all they do within the confines of a facility
  that doesn't work as well as it needs to work. They see the Westport Public Library
  as a "Gem" of the community and a model for libraries everywhere. Residents look
  forward to incremental improvements to services and collections that are possible in
  the short term and many expressed support for a renewed library facility that will
  better meet their needs.
- Want to find more new materials on the shelves, including DVDs, fiction and nonfiction books, and additional new digital formats and resources.
- Would like to see the library respond more actively to the needs of younger residents, especially teens, with programs, collections and services that respond better to their needs.
- Would like to see the Westport Public Library continue as the cultural and
  intellectual heart of the community and as an inviting and welcoming hub of shared
  community activity and interaction. They would like to continue to use the library as
  they had in the past but find that the varied and increasing use of the library
  prevents them from access to computers, collections, meeting space or quiet space
  at many times of the day and evening.

#### Introduction

A series of eleven focus groups and one town meeting were held February through April 2010 in the Westport Public Library. The sessions were attended by approximately 161 people including library staff. Each attendee was invited to make statements about their use of the library and was also asked a few open-ended questions, by the facilitators, designed to stimulate discussion about the Westport Public Library, its future, and its importance to the community's quality of life.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>&</sup>quot;The Library's Strategic Plan 2007-2010 has been an essential and effective tool in prioritizing its ongoing efforts to be responsive to the community. The goal is to continue that model with the 2010-2013 Plan. That is why "...robust community input is vital," according to Library Director Maxine Bleiweis.

The Westport Public Library Board of Trustees hired Library Development Solutions, a library-consulting firm based in Princeton, New Jersey, to conduct a series of focus groups, a Community Conversation (Town Meeting) and a survey with community residents that would elicit suggestions for improved current and future

In addition to the focus groups, and the town meeting, an online survey was conducted and completed by 429 respondents. The information from the survey about library use and needs will also be helpful to library planners. There were many similarities with regard to library usage among the groups. The consultants spoke with many of the frequent users of the library as well as with infrequent users, including local students. Participation in the conversations and the survey was open to all residents of Westport as well as any library user. Participants responded to the following notices:

- Notices in the local online and traditional press
- Information in the library and on the library website
- Requests from Library Board members, staff and Friends of the Library

The information from the sessions will be a valuable tool for the library director and members of the Library Board as they consider the future library needs of Westport residents and all library users.

#### The Components

Focus groups are group interviews in which people are asked a series of open-ended questions in order to obtain information about their perceptions and attitudes about the library. In Westport, we explored satisfaction and dissatisfaction with current library services, as well as the participants' vision of what their "ideal library" might look like, and their awareness of various library services.

#### The following are some of the topics that were discussed with the various groups:

- Changes that have taken place in the Westport community in the past few years
- What is unique about the Westport community
- The role of the library in the community and specifically in the downtown area
- A description of an ideal library
- Other libraries people may use and why
- Satisfaction with library services, collections, programs, access and the library facility
- Suggested areas of improvement for library services, collections, programs and facilities
- Community awareness about the library and its services

library services and facility. The purpose of the conversations was to listen to community concerns about the library, to provide participants with an opportunity to offer to the Library Board their ideas about the community's library needs, and to discuss options for supporting changed or improved library services and facilities. The Library Board believes that information from the town meetings and the survey will assist in the director and board's abilities to make important decisions about library resources and help to develop the library's new strategic plan.

- Reasons for library non-use and any barriers to use
- Awareness about the library's Transformation Project

#### **Focus Group and Town Meeting Participants**

•	Educators	12
•	Civic and Local Leaders	7
•	Business Leaders	6
•	Friends of the Library and Volunteers	15
•	Middle School Students	15
•	High School Students	22
•	Seniors	18
•	Parents of young children	4
•	Parents of special needs children	2
•	Library Staff	18
•	General town meeting	24
•	People who use the library for work	5
•	Organizations that use the library	8
•	Library Administration	5
•	TOTAL	161

The sessions lasted approximately 1½ hours. Similar questions were asked of all groups. Comments from all sessions were recorded and transcribed to create a record of the meeting.

Each of the focus group discussions encouraged debate about what the future of library service in Westport should be like. Group members were excited to be asked for their input, appreciated the opportunity to engage in a dialog about the library with other residents, and offered many helpful suggestions and ideas.

### **User Survey Participants**

Four hundred and twenty nine (429) people participated in the library user survey. They described their use of the library, their suggestions for improvements and comments about the library's role in the community among many comments. Their experiences in the library are highly favorable as they offered some comments about improvements in library hours, computer access and use in the library, after school programs for students and collections and services for parents and teens. They made recommendations to improve the café and the McManus community meeting room. Many respondents recognize that the improvements to the library's programs and services are constrained by the deficits of the library building. The responses are helpful in supporting and/or challenging the findings of the focus groups. The survey asked about frequency of use, reasons for use and favored activities at the library.

Community Conversations or town meetings are basically group interviews in which people are asked to provide their suggestions, comments and experiences with the library in order to obtain information about their perceptions and attitudes about the library. In Westport we also explored satisfaction and dissatisfaction with current library services and the facility, as well as the participants' visions of what their ideal Westport Public Library might be like. Participants were also asked about their awareness of the library Transformation Project and their view of it to this point. The data from these groups is helpful in obtaining a snapshot of where the community may be in terms of its attitudes about libraries in general and the highly rated Westport Public Library in particular.