



Bethany Library Association Strategic Plan

2025 - 2028

Contents

Town of Bethany and Library Profile	2
Review of Accomplishments	2
Planning Process	4
Strategic Goals	4
Implementation of the Strategic Plan	5
Clark Memorial Library Association Board.....	7
References.....	7

Town of Bethany and Library Profile

Clark Memorial Library is a public library in Bethany Connecticut. It is an association library that is governed by the non-profit Bethany Library Association. Although the library is not a municipal department and is governed by an all-volunteer board, the library relies on an annual grant from the town of Bethany that provides substantial support for operating expenses. The library also receives generous community donations and is regarded as an asset to the quality of life of residents.

The current population of Bethany is 5,295, consisting of 1,742 households. This represents a decrease in population since 2020, when records reflected Bethany's population at 5,909. The largest segment of the Bethany population is comprised of people in their 40s, followed by people in their 50s, which, when combined, total 30% of the town's population. Children make up 22% of the Bethany population. Over 50% of Bethany's population has college or advanced degrees, exceeding the State of Connecticut average. Over 2,795 Bethany residents have library cards.

The library is a member of the LION (Libraries Online) Consortium, which gives access to the holdings of 30 other libraries in Connecticut. The shared catalog makes it possible for patrons to order print books from other libraries and have them delivered to Bethany. Moreover, since the pandemic, library patrons have been regularly utilizing self-placed online holds for library pickup. Rather than browsing the existing collection at the library building, patrons are 50% more likely to select their materials using the online catalog from home, placing a hold on the materials and picking them up at the library. In 2019, there were 1,081 holds placed by library staff for patrons by request. In 2023 this number had shrunk to 568. At the same time, self-placed online holds increased from 2060 to 5,814, an increase of approximately 187%. The library has seen a steady increase in the use of digital borrowing materials. Nearly half of the library's circulation, or 47.66%, is now accessed electronically. Notwithstanding these changes in library use, circulation of print materials from the children's room collection have remained steady.

Review of Accomplishments

The most recent Strategic Plan written for Clark Memorial Library and initiated by the Bethany Library Association was for the 5-year period between 2016-2021. Seven major goals – **Financial, Buildings & Grounds, Technology, General Services, Patron Services, Staff and Board Functions** -- were identified along with action steps. The first several years of the planning cycle were productive in realizing many of the action steps, but the onset of the pandemic in early 2020 affected both the progress and priority of those goals.

In late 2019 the Association experience a substantial change in leadership, with both a new Library Director and a new Board President arriving at the same time. The library also received

a state grant for a long-awaited renovation of the Children’s Room in November 2019, which required a very aggressive fundraising schedule for matching funds. The Board, Director and staff navigated these challenges, along with adapting day-to-day library operations to the “new normal” of COVID restrictions which had to take priority over more long-term planning and implementation. During this time, thanks to the Town of Bethany, the Friends of the Library Association, and an outpouring of community support, the Association raised over \$130,000 in matching funds to meet the state grant requirements, and support the library in maintaining services through long months of closures, quarantines and changing schedules. Even with supply chain delays and restrictions on library access, the long-planned renovation of the children’s room was completed in Fall 2022.

Although COVID was a set-back in accomplishing some goals, staff adapted unusually well and some of the newly developed services proved to be effective in serving patrons and were kept in place as the library returned to normal. This adaptability and awareness of new priorities will help shape future approaches.

The majority of goals from the 2016-21 plan were met despite unforeseen challenges, and the Board initiated the process for creating a new Strategic Plan in January 2024.

Strategic goals met and objectives accomplished, by both library staff and volunteers, include, but are no means limited to the following highlights:

Financial & Budget Management –

- Identified and implemented numerous cost-cutting measures and CT Library Consortium discounts

Development & Fundraising – Sought new Revenue Sources

- Successfully raised funds for the Children’s Room renovation.
- Added **The Great Give** fundraising event
- Established the **1937 Legacy Society**, a new Planned Giving Program

Building & Grounds --

- Completed of Children’s Room renovation and redesign, and CT State grant reports filed
- Other improvements
 - Exterior: parking lot repaved, sidewalk replaced, front garden redesigned and pollinator garden added, plus memorial brick terrace installed, new roof, chimney repair
 - Interior: efficient lighting installed, new water fountains installed, fire alarm system upgraded, electrical system upgraded to meet code standards, new wireless access throughout the building.

Technology –

- Implemented new donor management system proving more efficient data base to communicate with donors
- Upgraded accounting software
- Upgraded wireless network and infrastructure

Programming, Services, & Community Outreach –

As the pandemic eased, programs and services were reintroduced and expanded to help meet the needs of the community. Programming needs were balanced with staff and volunteer availability and expertise.

Planning Process

The Board began by looking at several other library’s strategic plans and by reviewing our 2016 plan. In 2016, the Board engaged a consultant to assist, but the Board decided that for this cycle, the governance committee would take on the task, with the assistance of the Library Director.

The committee consulted references on strategic planning and best practices for libraries. We developed a plan and timeline that included the following phases:

- Data Collection – gather input about and from the community and staff
- Analyze results and identify themes
- Develop strategic plan and document

Our first step in collecting data was to run an online survey of patrons, non-patrons and staff. Links to the survey were advertised in the town bulletin, posted on the website, sent out in the newsletter and posted in the library. The survey ran for several months and garnered 113 responses. 65% of respondents were frequent patrons and the remainder seldom or ever visit Clark Memorial library. Patrons were generally happy with library services, particularly the staff, digital resources, the curbside pickup. The survey provided tactical ideas to pursue – additional programs, changes in hours, etc. but no overriding themes to pursue strategically. The committee also visited a nearby library, similar in many ways to Clark, to gather additional information and ideas. The visit was informative and inspiring. The library had been through a strategic planning process and found that traditional methods of determining patron needs and interests were not effective in driving strategy, although they were able to offer suggestions that proved to be helpful as we moved forward.

With all of this information in hand, the committee revisited the 2016 strategy to look at what had been accomplished, what remained incomplete and assess the relevance of those items. Many of the items on prior strategic plan were complete ~~(see section entitled Library Accomplishment for details)~~. Any items that remained were no longer relevant. The 2016 plan included tactics as well as strategy. For this strategic plan, the committee opted to state goals at a high level, with the expectation that the Board and director will develop and revisit tactics annually.

Strategic Goals

The following five strategic areas focus not only on those that directly impact library users, but also areas that are behind-the-scenes, though no less important. There is some overlap with the areas developed during the 2016 strategic planning process, but the new strategic goals further emphasize the significance of a holistic approach to the library's infrastructure, the impact of effective outreach, and a forward-looking approach to financial and association sustainability.

Financial:

- We will grow our capacity to serve our patrons and to promote further financial sustainability as a non-profit.
- We will develop a multi-year capital plan, operating budget, and investment goals aligned with strategic goals.
- We will promote the Legacy Society and other fundraising programs, as well as pursuing relevant grants.

Infrastructure and Building Capabilities:

- We will develop and execute a maintenance and repair schedule.
- We will review and assess continuing technological trends in libraries, implementing them as appropriate.
- We will evaluate library flow and ongoing use of space.

Communication and Outreach:

- We will evaluate communication channels (i.e. print, social media, newsletters, email) and implement changes to increase effectiveness.
- We will cultivate relationships with local schools, organizations, and other community partners to strengthen engagement.

Programming and Services:

- We will continue to provide programs and services that are of community interest based on continued assessment.
- We will create an on-going needs assessment program.
- We will develop a staffing and training plan to meet those needs.

Association Sustainability:

- We will develop a plan for Association and Association Board sustainability, vitality and diversity.
- We will develop a playbook for the Association activities and its responsibilities.

Implementation of the Strategic Plan

The Board intends for the Strategic Plan to guide the future success of the Association and the Library. Short-term and long-term goals with corresponding tactics will be developed by the Association Board committees in consultation with the Library Director, library staff, and the

entire Board. Every effort will be made to ensure goals are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound).

Goal updates and progress will be reported on during regular Board and Board Committee meetings, with feedback gathered and appropriate adjustments made. We will celebrate successes and changes through regular communications and updates to the community. The goals will be reviewed at least annually in conjunction with the budgeting process.

The Governance Committee and Library Director will revisit the strategic plan three years from the adoption of this plan.

Clark Memorial Library Association Board

Susan Hartnett, President*

Serena Guerrette, Vice President

Calico Harington, Secretary

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Jeremy Garritano*

Serena Guerrette

Susan Hartnett

Mark Hawes

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