

Hubbard Free Library Community Forum Discussion Highlights

Context

This document summarizes the outcomes of Hallowell Free Library community forums held in early 2019. Two, two-hour sessions were held; the events were publicized widely and scheduled at times that, in the judgment of trustees, would increase the likelihood of resident participation.

Raw notes from each session follow the “themes” section, which is an attempt to make actionable commonalities from the two sessions.

Community Forum Themes

Focus on Children, Youth and Family-Friendly Offerings

There is a prevalent belief that Hallowell has focused its growth on offerings of interest to adults at the expense of attracting families and children. The library is viewed as a strategic leverage point to widen this focus to be welcoming to families and younger generations. Making Hallowell “the town for all ages” excited and inspired forum participants.

The children’s space and current program offerings are well received; consider expanding these offerings and widening the focus to include arts and crafts, yoga and book clubs for kids, for instance.

There is also a belief that building an early and lifelong connection to the library will yield positive outcomes, making it easier to make the case to future adults that the library is relevant and important to community well-being. There is a demonstrated appetite for place-based connections, where families can meet and connect with one another in a relaxed, child-friendly environment that offers open space and structured program offerings.

Much interest exists in formalizing and enhancing teen offerings, and there were many suggestions for where to begin. Having teens serve as volunteers or interns at the library, teaching classes to adults on computer skills, to having their own niche book clubs, game or movie nights, sleepovers at the library, and writing programs for youth are some of the proposed starting points.

Increase Offerings Outside the Walls

The intersection of being outdoors, learning, forming connections and having fun piqued interest. Whether it is planting a butterfly garden, adding picnic tables, or extending the seasonality of the farmer’s market, making library offerings visible to passersby and maximizing the beautiful grounds appeals to residents. There is the belief that many in Hallowell live in rental units and do not have routine or direct access to restful outdoor spaces. The library could help to fill this void, among others.

Other program suggestions outside the walls include physical recreation offerings, such as a basketball court and fitness trail up the hill. Historical walking tours of Hallowell that begin and end at the library bring the community alive. So could small venue outdoor musical offerings, such as jazz performances.

There is interest in active cultivation of partnerships with community organizations – taking the organization’s offerings outside the walls by sponsoring and co-hosting events, from formal affairs that could generate revenue for the organizations involved or delivering historical or other programs off-site. Potential partners include the Maine State Museum and public schools, and utilizing existing spaces, such as the former fire department. Developing relationships with other organizations and being strategic in offering a wider array of off-site programming will increase library visibility and relevance, ultimately building allegiances and financial support.

Hubbard Free Library Community Forum Discussion Highlights

Fill Niches of Known Unmet Needs

Positioning the library as meaningfully filling niches of unmet needs increases the likelihood of greater awareness by a wide array of residents of the central role the organization plays in community well-being. For instance, there is the belief that an equipment loan program (e.g., binoculars, snowshoes, pickle ball) could bring real value to the community.

Investing in a movie screen and hosting film series with discussion afterward for an array of ages is another example.

Consider the Role of Food and Retail in Connecting People and Building Community

Coffee, books and conversation seem to go together in the minds of community forum participants. Locating a coffee shop in the library, along with art- and local lore-related offerings for sale appealed to many. The impression is that there are few to no places in Hallowell for residents to showcase their sale-quality artistic offerings. The combination of coffee, books and art are elements that many believe will build frequent and return visits, increasing appreciation for and investment in the library.

Financial Well-Being and Expanding Library Capacity

Most remain confused and seek to better understand the library funding model.

A belief shared by many is that the municipality should play a larger and more formalized role in the library's future. It came as a surprise to many that the library is not a municipal department.

Other fund generation-related ideas include widening the array of methods through which supporters can contribute. Suggestions include monthly automatic contributions; harnessing well trained volunteer talent to organize events and programs and work library shifts so that the library can be open more hours; co-hosting events with other nonprofits and sharing generated revenue.

January 24, 2019 Session Outcomes

Goals and Aspirations for Hallowell

- Expand Hallowell's cultural reach in community beyond Water Street.
 - Have a cultural alley – Second Street.
- Connect to the state library and focus on first amendment museum, archives, homestead.
 - Make history accessible.
 - Effective communication of the community's history to the next generation of leaders.
- Have the community recognized as an artistic, cultural, environmental and science hub of central Maine, with a grand piano as part of it.
- Ensure that the small-town neighborhood feel remains intact and that activities reinforce it, including the library – neighborhood and library partnerships, with more multigenerational activities.
- Economic base expands to pay for what the community wants. More people and businesses without getting too big. Maintain the community's unique identity.
- More immigrants in our community, and more young families.
- Apple products at the library for compatibility-sake, with enough staff to offer step-by-step support.
- Ensure more events for families. Focus less on parades and drinking to other offerings.

Hubbard Free Library Community Forum Discussion Highlights

- Actively encourage volunteering and make those who do more well known. Advertise in highly visible and meaningful ways.
 - Utilize churches to publicize needs.
- Tap into students living in dorms and engage them in community via the library, which could be a really good chill space.
- “The town for all ages”.
 - Expand the playground so it serves both big and little kids – play equipment, basketball court, for example.
 - A fitness trail for the hill.
- Honor and celebrate all that is good in Hallowell and the hard work it takes to make it this way. Also, work together to cultivate more positive changes.

Existing Library Contributions to Our Goals and Aspirations

- Events bring people together, though sometimes the crowds are small.
 - Good job coordinating with Harlow and the City; it gives cohesion to the efforts. Luthier’s week is a good example.
 - Holiday events.
- Serves families well.
 - Reading programs for kids.
 - Author events for little kids are good.
 - Letting kids serve as volunteers.
- Availability of computers for kids, people looking for jobs.
- The historical collection.
- Good bulletin board.
- Advertising of current library events.
- Very welcoming and relevant to today’s culture and society.
- Meeting space – do more of this.
- The racks are on wheels to allow spaces to open up.
- Granite Hill outreach.
- Good web page.

New Ways that the Library Can Contribute to Community

- Free wifi, snacks and being open more frequently and for longer hours.
- A café.
- A Saturday morning coffee hour.
- Three times a year, chef brings meal choices and for \$100, get the meal and music.
- A film club.
 - Alec Guinness festival.
 - Outdoor screen in August.
- Seek continuous input on which books to purchase for the library.
- Have a weatherproof shed to store chairs.
- Buy Eric’s building for meeting space.
- Cultivate better relationships with Chelsea, Farmingdale, Manchester.
- The Dr. Hubbard little house – open it and use it for a book store to raise funds for the library.

Hubbard Free Library Community Forum Discussion Highlights

- Small jazz groups in the afternoon – like Tiny Desk on National Public Radio.
- Focus less on doing more and more on doing well by filling a niche/need.
- Partner more frequently and intentionally with Vaughan Woods.
- Create a cultural district.
- Create tours of Hallowell – focusing on history followed by downtown and dinner.
- Emphasize the architectural significance of the library building. Reactivate and honor the building.
- More accessible parking.
- Expand the library using the old fire station.
 - Offer shared work spaces – co-working.
 - Place art and history on exhibit – rotating, eye-catching.
 - More Mac-compatible services including printing, with staff that can assist.
 - Routine orientations to what the library has available to the public.
 - Rent equipment – snow shoes, pickle ball, birding books and binoculars.
- Annual auction for Friend’s group.
- Sponsor art classes utilizing community members who share their talents through instruction.
- Book club for kids.
- Host genealogy events.
- Showcase historical books and then put on a play.
- Use “little library” concept to get books out to community.
- Focus on kids and constructive activities that serve both.
- Increase the variety and array of items that can be borrowed – e.g., specialized tools and appliances, 3D printer.
- Shift from books to information.

Creating a Productive, Thriving Relationship between the Community and Library, including Roles for Users, City and Philanthropy

- Put windows in the doors to avoid injury of those coming and going.
- Picnic tables outdoors so people can gather around the library.
- Combine Augusta, Gardiner and Hallowell library operating structures.
- Consider other business models and how the costs would vary.
- Dedicate a percentage of local taxes to the library. Increase support for the library.
- Many are surprised to learn that the library is struggling financially. More education is needed to support shared ownership of the challenge. For instance, this could engage philanthropists.
- A public discussion on property taxes – the City should “own” the library – feel a deep sense of responsibility to it.
- Create a formalized public/private partnership like the Stevens School.
- Carefully coordinate fundraising drives so they don’t overlap.
- Secure a grant writer for city hall.
- The city should pay more.

Hubbard Free Library Community Forum Discussion Highlights

March 9, 2019 Session Outcomes

Goals and Aspirations for Hallowell

- More focus on family-centered stuff – adult activities have taken over.
- Library becoming more of a community center.
- Grow the arts.
- Grow retail.
- More Monarch butterflies – have a butterfly garden at the library so children who don't have a garden have somewhere to go.
- Offerings that extend beyond the library walls.
- Bigger farmer's market with music and more vendors.
- A gala of many organizations coming together to put it on and share profits.
- Enhancing goodwill, overall.
- Facilitating community/political issues in a neutral space (library).
- Comprehensive plan for community should include the library.
- Finish the streets and clean ice off of the sidewalks.
- Make walkability a priority.
- Manage landscape along river.

Existing Library Contributions to Our Goals and Aspirations

- Children's programs/room helps facilitate friendly relationships among families.
- Book sales.
- Tech help is so helpful.
- Library staff are great ambassadors to community. Connecting people seems to be a priority.
- Art/craft projects for kids are great.
- Kids feel welcome and comfortable in the space.

New Ways that the Library Can Contribute to Community

- Find ways to engage teens.
 - Book club specifically for teens.
 - Curriculum on problems in democracy, music, drawing, photography and other arts.
 - Internships at the library.
 - Ice cream parlor.
 - Teen center.
 - Community theater.
 - Movie screen at the library.
 - Writing program like the Telling Room in Portland. An online magazine for students.
 - Teen sleepover at the library.
 - Capstone projects for teens.
 - Host youth-appropriate contests.
 - Video game nights.
- Library becomes the place for the gathering and doesn't need to "own" the group or the work.
- More children's activities on weekends.
- Something with the Gaslight Theater.

Hubbard Free Library Community Forum Discussion Highlights

- Murder mystery night – something that ends at the library but incorporates other town venues.
- Collaborative activities with other community organizations and schools/galleries/homestead/teachers/Suzuki groups.
- Makers corner – pottery, art, crafts, woodwork – with a commission or people donate to it.
- Rudimentary computer classes or more advanced classes. Consider having students do the teaching.
- Engage history more.
- Major art exhibits.
- Shakespeare programs in the past – do again?
- Pick up some of the community programs that have been dropped.
- Open mike nights.
- Maintain a regular schedule of events.
- Community bulletin board.
- Kennebec Journal articles.

Creating a Productive, Thriving Relationship between the Community and Library, including Roles for Users, City and Philanthropy

- Yoga and art classes for k-5 kids.
- Advertise the library's offerings in a wider array of ways.
- Hubbard-sponsored programs happen elsewhere with more collaboration with community organizations and businesses.
- City needs to contribute more money/support.
- A monthly contribution option.
- Ensure education about the financial model and why people need to donate.
- Open more on Saturdays because people work and kids have nap time.
- Push weddings/birthdays/other events.
- Wine tasting with music.
- Better branding and more consistent programming.
- Add a teen to the board.
- Run a coffee shop in the library or a gift shop or both.
 - Sell postcards or art created at the library or through a library workshop.
- More digital engagement.
- Community radio station.
- Book recommendations from staff or other avid readers.
- Instagram account.