

**Hallowell Free Library**  
**Strategic Planning Information Gathering Outcomes Summary**  
Including notes from January 24 and March 9, 2019 Community Forums  
and  
Community Survey Results  
May 23, 2019

**Context**

The Board of Trustees of the Hallowell Free Library are working to increase the relevance of the library to community members. The Trustees hosted two public forums and widely distributed a survey to gather input from community members about the types of programming and services they believe the library could and should provide to increase use and membership, along with other topics.

This document summarizes the outcomes of community forums and the survey. 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. All told, approximately 50 community members participated in one or both sessions. The questions posed during the forums were:

- 1) What are some of the goals and aspirations for the community that you would like to see accomplished in the next 5-10 years?
- 2) What does the library do very well now to address these goals and priorities, and how do you know?
- 3) What are new opportunities for the library to make a difference, contribute and innovate?
- 4) If in 3-5 years from now, the library and community have a thriving, productive relationship, what does it look like? What three steps are critical to making this happen?
- 5) What role should the municipality/residents/philanthropy play in making this possible?

For the survey, Hubbard trustees mailed a post card notice to 1,585 postal addresses in Hallowell. The post card asked recipients to take the community survey and contained a link to the Community Survey on line at the Hubbard's website. It advised that persons without computer access could obtain and complete get a paper copy at the Hubbard.

One hundred and eight (108) responses were recorded. This is a return rate of 6.83 percent..

The survey respondents were 66.3% female. Sixty-three percent had a graduate or professional degree. Ninety-two percent were aged 36 and over and roughly forty-eight percent were aged 65 and over.

Ninety percent listed Hallowell as their residence.

Below is a distillation of input received from the community through this combination of information gathering.

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**Programs and Services**

***Focus on Children, Youth and Family-Friendly Offerings***

There is a prevalent belief that Hallowell has focused its efforts at growth on offerings of interest to adults at the expense of attracting families and children. The library is viewed as a strategic leverage point in the community to widen this focus and 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; it was recommended that trustees consider expanding these offerings and widening the focus to include arts and crafts, yoga and book clubs for kids, for instance.

There is 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 an appetite for place-based connections, where families can meet and socialize with one another in a relaxed, child-friendly environment that offers both 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.

The survey responses also revealed the following.

The Hubbard’s greatest strengths:

- Books 81.4%
- Location 74.5%
- Architecture 64.7%
- Staff 61.8%
- Cost 39.2%
- Children’s Programming 20.6%

The perceptions of the Hubbard’s most used services;

- Borrowing books 86%
- Attend Programs 54%
- Attend meetings 31%
- Additional Services Favored:
  - Community Center 89.2%
  - Cultural Venue 79.6%
  - Information Resource 74.2%

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In addition, respondents listed more than one hundred suggestions for enhancing their experience of using the Hubbard and living in Hallowell. These will be catalogued for future reference.

***Increase Offerings Outside the Walls***

The intersection of being outdoors, learning, forming connections and having fun piqued the interests of many. 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 forum attendees. 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 while simultaneously building community connections and offering educational and enrichment opportunities.

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.

***Collaborate with Community Organizations***

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 to delivering historical or other programs off-site – is a practice that forum attendees believe benefits everyone. Potential partners include the Maine State Museum and public schools. This approach allows supporters of other organizations to see the library in new ways.

Utilizing existing spaces outside of the library such as the former fire department for library events is another form of collaboration and makes an array of events possible that the existing library space cannot accommodate. The concept of “the Hubbard on the move” allows the library to be perceived as dynamic, multi-faceted and indispensable to the community. 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, it is believed, financial support.

***Fill Niches of Known Unmet Needs***

Positioning the library as meaningfully filling niches of unmet resident and community needs increases the likelihood of greater awareness by a wide array of residents of the central role the organization plays in 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. The suggestion that the library

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essentially tracks community needs and develops a reputation for meeting them is the mindset proposed for the library trustees and staff.

***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.

***Summary of Programs and Services Recommendations***

Categorically, survey respondents believe that the Hubbard's focus of attention over the next five years ought to be:

- Community Oriented (86%)
- Lifelong learning (81%)
- Early literacy for children (72.8%)
- Materials and programs for reading, viewing and listening (59.3%)
- Information Access (53.1%)
- Multicultural Exploration (50.6%)
- Family literacy for teens and adults (49%)
- Entertainment (43%)

Survey and community forum outcomes are generally aligned about future opportunities and prioritization of them.

***Financial Well-Being and Expanding Library Capacity***

Most remain confused by and seek to better understand the library funding model. It is reasonable to conclude that the need for education about this is ongoing; determining how to effectively accomplish this is a necessity.

Among those who had a grasp of the current funding model, the belief shared by many is that the municipality should play a larger and more formalized financial role in the library's future. It came as a surprise to many that the library is not a municipal department.

Survey outcomes are that the funding mix recommendations contain the following elements, in order of most recommended, to least:

- Grants, business and corporate
- City government

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- Private philanthropy
- Formally becoming part of the municipality

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.

Nearly eighty-three percent of survey respondents think the Hubbard needs more money to fulfill its mission and that most of this new money ought to come from donations, private sector firms, and the city government. Respondents strongly favor expanding the Hubbard's budget, and strengthening its financial underpinning through more diversified financial support from both public and private sources.

**In Conclusion**

Community forums of this nature tend to attract library users and supporters, making it difficult to assess overall levels of community awareness, interest in and commitment to the library's future. The ideas put forth by forum attendees were especially thoughtful in that they factored in current users, non-users and visitors to Hallowell from other communities, renters and property owners, businesses and nonprofits and patrons of all ages. This bodes well when trustees contemplate where to begin, and why, in charting a course for the future.

Survey respondents consider the Hubbard a community center, cultural venue and information resource and strongly supported the expansion of these uses going forward.

Overall, the respondents exhibited very strong support for and interest in keeping the Hubbard Free Library as a central element in the fabric of Hallowell and in expanding its service and role as a central feature of what makes Hallowell a special place.

**Community Forum Notes: 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.

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- 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.
- 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.

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**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.
- 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.

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**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.

**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.

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- 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.
- 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.

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**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.

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