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I am extremely pleased to share with you The Ferguson Library’s Strategic Plan for 2014-2017. It is the culmination of an eighteen-month project which included a community survey, multiple stakeholder interviews, staff focus groups, and a Board of Trustees retreat, all occurring during 2012 and 2013. The result is a comprehensive long range plan to further grow and strengthen the Library’s role as the educational, informational and cultural center of Stamford. Countless hours were spent in gathering and evaluating data, measuring the effectiveness of current collections and services, and identifying and developing the goals that will guide the future of The Ferguson Library. Special features of this plan include the crafting of new mission and vision statements, as well as updating our core values, and delineating our core services.

It is our hope, indeed expectation, that this plan will provide our entire city with an understanding of the direction in which the Library is headed, and how it expects to achieve its objectives. The efforts of our entire Ferguson Library system are focused on meeting the changing needs of its users, and the lifelong learning and continuing education of every member of the Stamford community.

Michael J. Cacace, Esq.
Chair, Ferguson Library Board of Trustees
Vision

Inspire, promote and foster lifelong learning and personal growth.

Mission

Provide free and equal access to information, ideas, books and technology to educate and enrich the Stamford community.

Core Values

Advance Literacy: Nurture and encourage literacy.

Inspire a Love of Reading: Celebrate life-long learning.

Atmosphere: Create a safe, inviting and comfortable environment that is conducive to reading, studying, learning and engagement.

Access: Provide convenient hours and locations for the Stamford community and remote access via our website.

Accountability: Responsibility for providing quality customer-driven services.

Connections: Build relationships among and between individuals and community groups.

Creativity/Innovation & Technology: Encourage creativity, experimentation and innovation while utilizing the latest technology.

Diversity: Embrace the numerous cultures and races in the community.

Equality: Freedom from bias or favoritism

Intellectual Freedom: Facilitate the free exchange of information and ideas.
Core Services

- Offer relevant, inspiring, and timely collections and information resources that meet the needs of the Stamford community.
- Promote and support reading for all ages, including a special focus on early childhood literacy.
- Encourage digital and computer literacy through technology training and access to the Internet.
- Advocate and support literacy, in particular for those where English is a second language.
- Make available community space for meetings and collaborative learning.
- Be Stamford’s source for high quality programs for all ages.
- Be an outlet for government programs and information.
- Provide U.S. passport acceptance service.
- Actively support the Friends Book Shop.
The Library encourages and supports learning. With a significant percent of the community holding a bachelor’s degree or higher, and three higher education institutions within Stamford, this community is a hub of learning. Beginning with baby story times, and continuing through adult workshops, the Library encourages learning at all levels. The Library provides resources to support the school system and its students. The Library is a place of books and digital resources as well as conversation, and community building, providing a space for discussing current and important social and political issues. It is an incubator of ideas via programs and a lab (that provides the tools for idea generating).

A. Encourage, advocate for early learning and school success.

1. Expand early childhood literacy efforts.

2. Join civic efforts to close educational achievement gaps.

3. Provide seamless connection among schools, families, and the public library.
GOAL 1: PROMOTE LEARNING AT ALL AGES AND ALL STAGES OF LIFE

B. Support learning opportunities tailored for users of different ages, abilities and interests.
   1. Engage, serve and empower teens through a high energy, innovative program of service.
   2. Build community around books.
   3. Generate civic conversations on political, social, environmental issues.

C. Be Stamford’s source for high quality programs for all ages.
   1. Build a diverse set of program offerings to meet the overall needs and interests of our community.

D. Serve as an incubator for ideas and innovation.
   1. Create a state-of-the-art digital lab that is both interactive and collaborative and that expands the Library’s role as the educational and technological hub of the community.

In 2014, what do we mean by “books?” Is it the revered printed word or is it virtual document we read on a device? The Ferguson Library is committed to providing content in all formats.
The Library has a vibrant print and digital collection that ensures it is easy for the end user to discover/find items. Our librarians connect users to the desired information/book and also provide resources and expertise to help those who want to create content. Ultimately, the Library will become a publisher for local authors and subjects.

A. **Look for new opportunities to build relevant collections.**
   1. With accurate and comprehensive statistics, ensure that the Library’s collections reflect the needs of the community.
   2. Explore ways to offer content in new formats.

B. **Provide unique local collections to and about the Stamford community.**
   1. Partner with local organizations such as the Historical Society, Stamford Art Association, etc., to establish or publish collections of unique interest to Stamford.
   2. Record and digitize special Library and/or Stamford events and make available for circulation/download.
   3. Invite individuals to contribute and/or create (print or audio) local Stamford content and make available for circulation.
C. Improve/invest in connecting people with the best books for their needs.
   1. Library users can make appointments with librarians for reading suggestions.
   2. Develop an online form for users to ask for reading recommendations.

D. Reconstitute our catalog to become the gateway to all the resources that The Ferguson Library collects, curates, and maintains.
   1. Review current procedures to ensure that we are using best practices in the catalog.
   2. Research traditional and non-traditional Integrated Library Systems to ensure that our systems incorporate the latest trends.

E. Invite users in and help them navigate library facilities and resources.
   1. Investigate ways to improve signage for each facility.
   2. Develop a help desk near or within eyesight of each entrance.

Libraries are becoming creation hubs—whether it is a photo collage made from local historical photos, a video of a local thought leader, or even a book. The 21st century library is the place to support all of those endeavors.
GOAL 3: INCREASE ACCESS TO LIBRARY AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Provide access to the entire Stamford community, including areas not in close proximity to a physical library. In addition to providing resources, the Library intends to be a hub and link to other community resources. The Library needs to become more outward looking, actively partnering with other organizations, and ensuring our offerings are visible to users and nonusers.

A. Address geographic and socioeconomic inequalities in library accessibility.
   1. Explore options for providing library services by meeting with community leaders or organizations.
   2. Partner with existing facilities (community centers and schools) to provide library services.

B. Increase library presence throughout Stamford.
   1. Increase partnerships with community organizations.
   2. Launch the Librarian Outreach Program.
GOAL 3: INCREASE ACCESS TO LIBRARY AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

C. Connect library users with community resources.
   1. Create a database that lists and describes services provided by local resources.

D. Promote the visibility of the Library and its resources.
   1. Increase awareness of the Library.
   2. Create compelling messages on a variety of platforms.

Librarians on the Go… It is easier than ever for librarians to provide services in the community. Some libraries have partnered with Red Box, others use pop up store, vans, and even bicycles. We are no longer limited by our facilities.
GOAL 4: STRENGTHEN THE LIBRARY ORGANIZATION

We need to address the internal needs of the Library so the organization can meet the first three goals, as well as grow. Staff development and internal communication are the most important aspects of this goal.

A. Strengthen our culture and systems to be an effective learning organization.
   1. Improve internal communication channels.
   2. Continue to foster a participatory environment with staff input in decision-making.

B. Empower the staff through access to continuing education, workshops, and in-house training opportunities.
   1. Encourage cross training.
   2. Build teams for learning.
C. **Ensure the Board of Trustees and Citizen Advisors are in tune with the community and the Library.**

1. Recruit talented members who represent various aspects of Stamford’s community.
2. Continue to nurture open communication between Board and the community.

D. **Strengthen the Friends of The Ferguson Library, our advocacy and support group, so members are our ambassadors.**

1. Help the Friends recruit board members who have the necessary skills and experience.
2. Improve communication channels between the Library and The Friends of the Ferguson Library.
GOAL 5: PURSUE THE LIBRARY’S FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

It is critical to have stable funding from a variety of sources, recognizing that the city is and should always be the Library’s primary funder.

A. Work with city leadership to develop an appropriate and predictable level of municipal funding for the Library.

B. Seek new and innovative sources of revenues that are appropriate for a public library.
   1. Review best practices from other nonprofits, especially hospitals, for adaptation by The Ferguson Library.

C. Make The Ferguson Library one of Stamford’s principal giving priorities.
   1. Explore options for growing the community of givers.
D. **Plan for and fund capital investments in the Library.**

1. Develop and fund a capital plan for all facilities which anticipates the costs of ongoing capital maintenance, improvements and technology.

2. Work with the city and private donors to have a functioning funding plan for capital expenses.

E. **Help our affiliated organizations, the Friends and Foundation, fulfill their mission of supporting the Library.**

1. Assist The Ferguson Library Foundation in implementing a development plan. Assist the Friends in developing a reliable income stream as the book shop is impacted by the changes in publishing, purchasing habits, and other future societal fluctuations.
The Ferguson Library has a long tradition of strategic planning for the future, as well as adopting major changes in the industry. At the conclusion of the 2006-2011 strategic plan, we found the Library at a crossroads: municipal funding had decreased while use of the Library was changing and increasing. The Board and the community responded to the financial crisis by increasing fundraising by 107%. The staff changed many of its programs in response to the financial crisis, helping users apply for jobs, hosting career fairs, and connecting users to social services.

Library services were changing in other ways as well. There has been a renewed focus on children and literacy; library programs have changed to reflect the most recent research on brain development. The Stamford school system has adopted the Common Core standards which will have an impact on student library needs. Our traditional book discussions are a perfect complement to the Common Core but other programs need to be revamped. While we have begun to offer more programs emphasizing science and technology, we have noted that other libraries have created production labs or maker spaces for their communities.

Libraries have been dealing with alternative material formats for several years. In the last 13 years, we have struggled, as have libraries nationally, to offer a comprehensive collection of ebooks to our community. Even when we are able to offer the latest bestseller, the price is significantly more than the print version. Public libraries have tried several different models to address this problem. Some have created their own platforms and collect ematerial from any publisher that will work with them. For the first time, space is not an issue, so libraries have begun to actively collect self-published authors.
As we were preparing for the next plan, we decided to look ahead 50 years: where did we see The Ferguson Library is 2063? How were we going to address the changes in library service and plan for the next major change? Meanwhile, this three-year strategic plan would begin to build the foundation for realizing that futuristic vision. Moreover, this plan would not address those core services that are integral to our mission and remain the same. All five of the goals reflect areas where we want to grow or alter current services.

Any plan such as this cannot be achieved without community input. In preparation for the development of this strategic plan, the Library gathered feedback from community members, stakeholders and partners, staff, and Board of Trustee members. The Ferguson Library embarked on a critical strategic planning process to establish a commonly understood vision and actionable strategies for the future of the Library.

The Ferguson Library has offered remote access to digital resources since the mid-1990s and ebooks since 2000.
These inputs include:

• **Community Survey (2012)** In 2012, The Ferguson Library conducted a community survey to learn more about how its customers use the Library, their views of the Library’s relative strengths and weaknesses, and their priorities and preferences for future services. The primary instrument was an online survey, although print versions were also available. Over 2,700 library users and non-users participated in the survey, which represents over 2% of Stamford’s population over five years of age.

• **Stakeholder Interviews (2013)** In May and June of 2013, The Ferguson Library contracted with BERK to conduct telephone interviews with ten stakeholders from the Stamford community. The interviews involved frank conversations with key partners and potential funders of The Ferguson Library, and included representation from community centers, schools, advocacy groups, business associations, and other community-based organizations. Conversations touched on a range of topics, including the Library’s strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities; the Library’s role in the community; resources and services; partnerships with community-based organizations; and communication channels.

• **Staff Focus Groups (2013)** In May 2013, three staff focus groups were held to obtain input on a broad array of topics, including library strengths and weaknesses, customer service, equity, budgeting, partnerships, rewarding and challenging aspects of working at the Library, and the future of the Library. An invitation to participate was extended to all staff other than administrators and supervisors, with a total of 45 staff members attending. The same basic questions addressing the topics noted above were asked at each discussion.

• **Board of Trustees Retreat (2013)** In June 2013, all ten members of The Ferguson Library Board of Trustees participated in a facilitated retreat where they reviewed the Library’s mission and vision statements and discussed issues relating to collections, programming, services, hours of operation, staff development, and operational sustainability.
Some of the key findings (for a full report please see Appendix A, “Ferguson Library Strategic Plan: Situation Assessment” prepared by BERK) include:

1. The Library does a lot of things well and should continue to build on its strengths. Some of its more notable strengths include: the Library’s broad inclusivity and its ability to adapt to Stamford’s rapidly changing demographics; its role as a community gathering space that helps bridge the gap between different racial and cultural groups; and excellent customer service via a staff that is knowledgeable, helpful, and readily available.

2. Geographic inequity is a major challenge facing the Library, as its current branch locations do not cover all neighborhoods. This significantly affects the Library’s ability to provide access to a growing number of communities throughout the city, especially lower income residents who face mobility challenges. Opportunities to address geographic inequity include increasing the scope and hours of the bookmobile and increased partnerships with schools and community-based organizations to establish a library presence in neighborhoods without a nearby branch.

3. Funding issues have posed a significant challenge to the Library and have negatively impacted its services, collections, and hours of operation. The Library should improve its fundraising efforts by reaching out to a broader and more diverse group of donors and more effectively messaging its value to the community at large. More could be done to promote and build awareness around the Library’s offerings (see #8).
4. Limited hours of operation do not currently meet the needs of the community and restrict access for those who are not available when their local branch is open. Survey respondents noted hours of operation as the aspect of the Library with which they are least satisfied.

5. Programming is becoming increasingly popular and there is growing demand for a broader range and greater quantity of library programming. Potential options for program expansion include children’s programming, classes for job-seekers, forums to discuss important social and health issues, author talks, and programs for immigrants, seniors, and young adults. As the Library does not have unlimited programming capacity, it should avoid redundancy when possible and “act as a hub with spokes” to connect users with other organizations that specialize in certain types of programs.

6. Attracting a younger demographic is critical to maintaining the Library’s vibrancy and relevancy and ensure it continues to be valued by the Stamford community. More attempts should be made to reach out to, provide programming for, and hire young adults. The Library should continue to seek opportunities to include young adults in planning and decision-making processes, as well as partner with other organizations that have a stronger youth presence.
7. Expanding and strengthening partnerships represents an important opportunity for the Library. While the Library has generally done a good job of establishing partnerships with community organizations, there are opportunities for improvement. There is work to be done in terms of ensuring that partnerships exist with organizations across the socioeconomic and cultural spectrum, and that as many constituents and geographic areas as possible are represented in those partnerships. The Library should also develop stronger and more integrated partnerships with schools at all levels, from pre-K to higher education. Additional efforts should involve making library services, resources, and facilities as available as possible to schools, as well as supporting and complementing school curricula.

8. A multi-faceted and tailored communication approach, sensitive to factors such as age and frequency of library use, would be most effective in promoting events, building awareness around library services, and communicating important updates or news. In addition, carefully targeted communications may encourage more use by populations or organizations who are currently underutilizing the Library.