

Focus on the Future

A Strategic Plan

for the

L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library

2011 - 2015

November, 2010

A Message from the President of the Library Board of Trustees

The Board and staff of the LEPMPL are excited about the future of our library. Building on a strong foundation, this plan directs us toward a bright future. The people of Eau Claire are justifiably proud of their library. They showed this pride recently by financing over half of a \$1,567,000 remodeling with their voluntary contributions. On the heels of the remodeling, the Board and staff of the library decided that it was time to reflect and plan for the next few years in the life of the library. This plan is our best guess as to what the library should do to keep it serving our community as the number one downtown destination. As you read the plan, if you find things that you think we missed, please contact the Library Director or any member of the Library Board. Don't forget to visit the library often; it's our treasure!

Katherine Schneider, President Library Board of Trustees 2008 - 2010

A Message from the Library Director

During the first half of 2010, the Library launched a strategic planning process by conducting online and mail surveys, focus groups, personal interviews and convening a Planning Committee to represent the Eau Claire community. In August 2010, the Library Board adopted a strategic plan for L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library (LEPMPL) for 2011-2015. The plan sets forth themes with goals and examples of potential strategies. Library staff has formulated a work plan with strategies and activities designed to guide and support fulfillment of the objectives. Regular review and modification of the work plan will further ensure the library's ability to successfully implement the strategic plan.

Thank you to the Library Strategic Planning Committee, the Library Board and staff and the Eau Claire community for their thoughtful input, work and encouragement on the strategic plan, which helped to create our new road map--our focus on the future. As a part of our strategic plan, LEPMPL will continue to seek out new and creative ways of service provision to insure that all citizens have access to the information, programs and services they want.

John Stoneberg, Director L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library

A Message from the City Manager

Our community is in the midst of an historic transition that is redefining our civic roles as community members and how we make decisions and govern ourselves. One of our most pressing challenges is that we as a people seemed to have lost the capacity to come together to solve the pressing political, social and economic issues that confront us. There is growing concern voiced from some quarters about the capacity of our nation, and even our world, to sustain democratic governance for future generations. Three decades ago, Benjamin Barber observed in Strong Democracy that “. . . democracies have rarely perished at the hands of armed aggressors or foreign enemies or alien ideologies . . . Democracy is undone by a hundred kinds of activity more profitable than citizenship; by a thousand seductive acquisitions cheaper than liberty.”

Democracy begins with the conversations that we as community members have about our collective interests and the choices we make about the kind of community we want. These conversations are the quintessential hallmark of active and productive citizenship and will require that we as individuals practice more effective civic problem-solving skills and that our governance and community institutions create more opportunities and public spaces where civic conversations can take place.

The LEPMPL strategic plan reaffirms the unique role of our public library as a place where people, information and ideas can come together in the fundamental conversations so essential to enriching our community and sustaining our democracy.

Mike Huggins, Eau Claire City Manager

Appreciation is extended to the following people for their hard work and dedication in creating this plan:

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Katherine Schneider, President, (2008-2010)

Library Staff

Numerous library staff members contributed time and effort in creating the plan.

Eighteen (18) staff members participated in a day-long session to help with the development of implementation strategies. Others reviewed and commented on components of the plan.

Last, but certainly not least, appreciation is extended to the nearly 1,000 Eau Claire area residents who participated in the planning process through focus groups, interviews, and surveys.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library (LEPMPL) is a center of community life and learning in the Eau Claire area. The library building is visited more often than any other facility in the downtown area. In 2009, more than 370,000 visitors checked out more than 1.3 *million* items. The number of people who entered the library last year could fill the stands at Green Bay's Lambeau Field five times over and, if all of the items checked out at the L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library last year were stacked one on top of the other, they would form 40 piles each one as tall as the IDS Tower in Minneapolis!

Almost 20,000 adults, teens and children attended programs, art exhibits and other special events at the library in 2009 and the LEPMPL website was visited an average of 20,000 times each month. Individuals in the area accessed online databases and other electronic library resources 126,000 times during the last year.

The library is a resource that belongs to everyone in the community. It offers access to informational, educational and recreational materials, electronic resources and quality programs for people of all ages. The library is clearly an important part of what the Eau Claire community is and does. The following strategic plan is designed to build on this legacy of service to the public and to ensure that the library remains relevant and plays an even more vital role helping the people of Eau Claire area succeed well into the future.

For decades, the pundits have predicted the demise of the public library. They have questioned the need for libraries in a world increasingly dominated by computers, Google™ and digital resources. However, instead of fading into the shadows, public libraries have flourished as computer technology, new formats of materials and new ways to disseminate information have taken their place alongside the books.

In some ways, libraries continue to serve many of the same functions they have performed in the past. They still collect and organize information and make it available to all. As they have for well over a century, they impart the joy of reading and a love of learning to children, they serve as a free "people's university" and they act as a center for lifelong learning where all who desire to improve themselves can find the resources they need to succeed. Tax-supported public library service began in Eau Claire in 1875.

However, the role of the public library in the twenty-first century has also changed and will certainly continue to change. Libraries have assumed a greater role in helping the public navigate the glut of information and misinformation that clogs the Internet. They have become a primary source of Internet access for millions of Americans who lack basic or high speed Internet access in their homes. They have taken on the role of subscribing to fee-based digital content on behalf of the public.

In addition, libraries are returning to a role that many libraries played in the late 1800s and early 1900s. They are becoming centers of community life where people can interact face-to-face with their fellow citizens to share and discuss ideas.

The L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library is a priceless asset. It has served the people of the Eau Claire area well in the past and it continues to offer boundless opportunities to this day. The strategic plan that follows is designed to ensure that the people of the greater Eau Claire area will retain this valued treasure for decades to come. However, the fundamental objective of the plan isn't the preservation of an iconic institution. Rather, the plan attempts to set a course that will ensure that future generations will continue to have the opportunity to access diverse information and ideas as well as physical and virtual spaces where people can come together to discuss their fears, hopes, concerns and ideals.

Information and ideas flow freely in healthy communities. The L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library is an indispensable component in making the Eau Claire area an outstanding place to live.

Over the past six months, the people of the Eau Claire area have been involved in a conversation about the kind of library services they want in the future. Nearly a thousand residents of the area have participated in that discussion through focus groups, personal interviews, a mail survey and a web-based survey. A Planning Committee comprised of citizens, library board members and library staff members developed the following plan based on the input received from the public and on service trends observed in the best public libraries in North America.

THE PLAN

Although this is a plan for the library, it is driven by a focus on what the library can do to ensure that Eau Claire remains an outstanding place to live, learn, work and play for its citizens.

THE LIBRARY'S VISION

The L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library works with the people of the Eau Claire area to build a strong, vibrant, inclusive community.

MISSION

The L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library promotes the joy of reading, the love of learning and the sharing of ideas by providing open access to ideas and knowledge and professional guidance in finding, evaluating and using information.

VALUES

The L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library values:

- ***open access to information and ideas:*** The library strives to enhance learning and to ensure access to information for all.
- ***intellectual freedom:*** The library strives to provide resources and programs that offer a wide variety of viewpoints on a broad range of topics.
- ***individual privacy:*** The library protects every individual's right to explore information and ideas in a confidential manner.
- ***the community's investment in library services:*** The library recognizes that it belongs to the people of the community and strives to be an exceptionally good steward of the investment and trust that the public has placed in it.
- ***collaboration:*** The library works together with non-profit organizations, other governmental entities, businesses and individuals that share the library's Vision and Mission to maximize the benefits available to every resident of the Eau Claire area.
- ***exceptional customer service:*** The library staff provides assistance and professional guidance to its customers in a friendly, courteous and respectful manner.

- **staff, volunteers and Friends:** The library values its employees, volunteers and its Friends as individuals as well as for their important contributions to the library's ability to serve the public.

STRATEGIC THEMES

The library has identified six strategic themes to guide its efforts in the coming years. They are:

- **Build community and contribute to the development of an informed and engaged citizenry**
- **Grow a new generation of young readers**
- **Attract and nurture new library users**
- **Enhance services valued by traditional library users**
- **Maximize the impact of the public's investment in library services**
- **Enhance the library's position as a "center of community life"**

Following is a short discussion of each of these themes and examples of potential strategies that will enable the library to achieve its goals – a collection of ideas that will need ongoing discussion and refinement.

Strategic Theme # 1

Build community and contribute to the development of an informed and engaged citizenry

Goal: Residents of all ages in the Eau Claire area are fully engaged in community life and enrich the quality of life in the area by taking advantage of opportunities to interact with their fellow citizens.

Rationale: Healthy communities are comprised of individuals who are engaged and involved in shaping the future of the place in which they live. Libraries are unique “boundary spanning” organizations that offer unparalleled opportunities for diverse segments of the population to interact. The library *belongs* to the young and the old, the rich and the poor. Libraries open their doors and offer their services to people from every walk in life, of every race, religion and political point of view.

The library can be a place where the people of the community come together to find common ground and to forge solutions to important community issues and problems in an *information rich* environment. The library can promote and encourage civic discourse and engagement that results in a vibrant, active community.

Examples of Potential Strategies:

- ***Explore ways to enhance the ongoing funding available for cultural programming and to create greater opportunities for civic engagement.***
- ***Enhance the quality of meeting room space to include appropriate technologies and more comfortable seating.***
- ***Evaluate the mix of adult programming and consider hosting more programming planned with specific “community building” purposes/outcomes in mind.***

Strategic Theme # 2

Grow a new generation of young readers

Goal: Children from birth to three years have new opportunities to develop early literacy skills that prepare them to enter school ready to learn and impart the joy of reading and a pattern of lifelong learning.

Rationale: Our society depends on a literate citizenry. The library has been active in providing pre-school story hours and other programming and services through day-care facilities in the past. However, the library is in a position to make a unique contribution to the development of early literacy skills among children from birth through three years of age by focusing on this age group. This new focus also represents a new opportunity to work more closely and collaboratively with the schools and other agencies to ensure that the children of the Eau Claire area enter school ready to learn.

Examples of Potential Strategies:

- *Focus greater attention on providing early literacy skills for children from birth to three years of age, for their parents and for their care-givers.*
- *Work collaboratively with educators to develop strategies that promote reading readiness. Include attention to English as a Second Language (ESL)/ English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) needs.*
- *Act as a convener of organizations with a stake in providing early childhood and family literacy skills to develop plans for how to maximize the impact of individual organization efforts through cooperation and collaboration.*
- *Acquire additional resources and tools needed to effectively implement early literacy efforts.*
- *Maintain a focus on making the introduction to books and reading “fun!”*

Strategic Theme # 3

Attract and nurture new library users

Goal: Residents of the Eau Claire area are offered relevant new resources, services and programs that are increasingly delivered in non-traditional ways that save a new generation of library users time and money and contribute to personal success and quality of life.

Rationale: LEPMPL is already involved in providing a wide variety of services and information in digital formats and online through its website. However, the library will need to be even more aggressive in facilitating the delivery of downloadable content and in offering access to users of handheld devices if it is going to remain relevant to a new generation of “digital natives.”

Examples of Potential Strategies:

- *Continue to work with libraries and other library organizations to obtain the most advantageous pricing on the licensing of proprietary content and e-reader devices.*
- *Work with other libraries and library organizations to develop and implement applications that provide convenient access to relevant information through handheld devices.*
- *Adopt a virtual branch strategy for the ongoing development and enhancement of web-based services.*
- *Create physical spaces for teens and adults that highlight new technologies and create environments conducive to using them.*

Strategic Theme # 4

Enhance services valued by traditional library users

Goal: Residents of all ages in the Eau Claire area continue to have convenient access to a wide range of high-quality traditional library resources, services and programs that contribute to their quality of life and enable them to succeed at work, at school, and in their personal lives.

Rationale: LEPMPL is already widely respected in the community. The public recognizes many of the library's strengths such as its extensive collection, exceptional children's and adult programming, the availability of additional resources through the MORE Consortium and the library's connection to arts and culture in the community. Since these services are highly valued by the taxpayers, an ongoing effort must be made to preserve and enhance them.

Examples of Potential Strategies:

- *Continue purchase of traditional/print materials that satisfy public demand and maintain a well-balanced collection.*
- *Improve "browsability" of library collections through user-friendly/intuitive arrangement of shelving, enhanced displays and better signage.*
- *Work to ensure that home delivery services continue to be available to those who are physically unable to come to the library.*
- *Address inequities/inconsistencies that exist between/among MORE consortium member libraries.*
- *Address access issues related to the elevator's existing location.*
- *Enhance the quality of meeting room space to include appropriate technologies and more comfortable seating.*
- *Introduce the option of self-check technology (ideally RFID-based).*

Strategic Theme # 5

Maximize the impact of the public's investment in library services

Goal: The people of the Eau Claire area benefit as the library employs new technologies, adopts best practices and develops strategic partnerships that enhance its capacity to serve the public.

Rationale: Securing additional tax-based funding for library services in the current economic climate will be extremely difficult. While implementing some components of the plan will undoubtedly require additional public support, the library recognizes that it has an obligation to provide both existing and emerging services as efficiently as possible.

Examples of Potential Strategies:

- ***Conduct a cost analysis to determine costs and payback time related to the implementation of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology as well as ancillary technologies such as self-check, RFID-based security systems and automated materials handling systems.***
- ***Address inefficiencies related to the “pass-around” security procedure used at the circulation desk and develop both short-term “work-arounds” and a long-term strategy (including investigating the implementation of RFID technologies) for eliminating this problem.***
- ***Work with IFLS/MORE to encourage them to assume the leadership role in pursuing the implementation of RFID technology throughout the MORE Consortium.***
- ***Examine traditional service delivery mechanisms in reference and adult services and consider the implementation of emerging, more interactive models of providing information services.***
- ***Study and implement, if feasible, the reprogramming of space on the first and second levels to streamline the shelving of materials that are checked out most frequently.***
- ***Study and implement, if feasible, the reprogramming of space on the first and second levels to establish a public service staff presence on the upper level.***

Strategic Theme # 6

Enhance the library's position as a "center of community life"

Goal: The vitality of the downtown area is enhanced and personal interaction between and among area residents increases as physical improvements to the library building and the surrounding area reinforce the library's position as an indispensable center of community life.

Rationale: LEPMPL already serves as a center of community life; however, enhancing this role is particularly important in light of ongoing efforts to redevelop the downtown area. Efforts to improve the physical facility and the area surrounding the library as well as the addition of amenities that make it a "destination" will serve the dual purposes of increasing the vitality of the central business district and providing a vibrant center of community life where residents of the area can meet and interact.

Examples of Potential Strategies:

- *Work with the City on plans to redevelop the areas immediately surrounding the library and reflective of its place in the redevelopment of Downtown Eau Claire.*
- *Explore the potential for creating more green space in the area immediately surrounding the library.*
- *Work with the City to improve the visibility of existing parking as well as pedestrian approaches to the library.*
- *Address access issues related to the elevator's existing location.*
- *Consider the addition of a café, permanent Friends' bookstore and/or other amenities that build the library's reputation as a "destination."*
- *Enhance the quality of meeting room space to include appropriate technologies and more comfortable seating.*
- *Re-envision current space use to create a friendlier, more engaging first impression upon entering the building.*