

Curtis Memorial Library

Strategic Plan 2020

(Accepted by Board of Directors on 10-15-2020)



Background

In 2019 the library Board and staff started evaluating the library's existing strategic plan with the goal of updating the library's mission and vision. This work was completed at the end of 2019.

In March 2020 the global Covid 19 pandemic caused the shutdown of the United States. Curtis Library closed on March 13, 2020 and staff did not start working in the building again until the beginning of June, 2020.

During the period when the library was closed, on May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a 46 year old black American was killed by a Minneapolis police officer. This ignited massive protests across the entire county and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter social justice movement.

Both of these factors substantially changed the anticipated direction of the library's goals over the next three-five years. Therefore, the plan was rewritten and adjusted to incorporate their impact at the local, community level and to provide a new path to move Curtis Library forward.

*“This is not a rant, nor is it a counsel of despair. There’s hope on the horizon. In her extraordinary essay, **The Pandemic is a Portal**, Arundhati Roy explains that pandemics force us to think the world anew; they are a gateway between an old world and a next, new era. As we step through we can drag our old ways with us or we can “walk through lightly, with little luggage,” honoring our dead by having the courage to try something else.”*

Portal Economics by Angus Hervey (4/28/2020) Futurecrunch.com



Our Values

On Friday, June 5 2020 after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the Curtis Library director and Board chair published a letter to the community in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. The letter was meant to articulate clearly the Curtis Memorial Library stands for and supports equity and social justice.

The Board of Directors of the library then committed to a path of self-education, reflection, and action with the goal of ensuring that the library is a strong ally to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

The Board started this process by reading and discussing *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo.

The second step was to write the following statement as a guideline for the library moving forward:

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement:

The Board of Directors of Curtis Memorial Library recognizes and affirms the dignity of the library's employees and all those the library serves, regardless of heritage, education, beliefs, race, income, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin and physical or mental capabilities.

The people who use, work, and volunteer at Curtis Memorial Library come from all walks of life. Therefore, it is important that we make diversity, equity, and inclusion a priority in planning, decision making, staffing, staff training, collection development, and services. With humility we strive to provide a safe, respectful space for diverse voices and perspectives and to be effective advocates for all people in our community.

The next steps in this process of education and action will be for the Board and staff to engage in a course of anti-bias training with the goal of evaluating library policies under that lens and then making needed adjustments.

Core Values of Librarianship

In addition to the library's focus on equity and social justice, we also subscribe to the core values of librarianship as defined by the American Library Association (ALA):

- **Access** – all information resources should readily, equally, and equitably accessible to all library users.
- **Confidentiality/Privacy** - protecting user privacy and confidentiality is necessary for intellectual freedom and fundamental to the ethics and practice of librarianship.
- **Democracy** - a democracy presupposes an informed citizenry. The First Amendment mandates the right of all persons to free expression, and the corollary right to receive the constitutionally protected expression of others. The publicly supported library provides free and equal access to information for all people of the community the library serves.
- **Diversity** - We value our nation's diversity and strive to reflect that diversity by providing a full spectrum of resources and services to the communities we serve.
- **Education and Lifelong Learning** - ALA promotes the creation, maintenance, and enhancement of a learning society, encouraging its members to work with educators, government officials, and organizations in coalitions to initiate and support comprehensive efforts to ensure that school, public, academic, and special libraries in every community cooperate to provide lifelong learning services to all.
- **Intellectual Freedom** - We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.
- **The Public Good** - ALA reaffirms the following fundamental values of libraries in the context of discussing outsourcing and privatization of library services. These values include that libraries are an essential public good and are fundamental institutions in democratic societies.
- **Preservation** - The Association supports the preservation of information published in all media and formats. The association affirms that the preservation of information resources is central to libraries and librarianship.
- **Professionalism** - The American Library Association supports the provision of library services by professionally qualified personnel who

have been educated in graduate programs within institutions of higher education. It is of vital importance that there be professional education available to meet the social needs and goals of library services.

- **Service** - We provide the highest level of service to all library users. We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.
- **Social Responsibility** – Curtis Library recognizes its broad social responsibilities. These are defined in terms of the contribution that librarianship can make in ameliorating or solving the critical problems of society; support for efforts to help inform and educate the people of our community on these problems and to encourage them to examine the many views on and the facts regarding each problem; and the willingness of Curtis Library to take a position on current critical issues.
- **Sustainability** - Sustainability is a core value of librarianship. This consists of practices that are environmentally sound, economically feasible and socially equitable. Libraries play an important and unique role in promoting community awareness about resilience, climate change and a sustainable future. They are also leading by example by taking steps to reduce their environmental footprint.

Curtis Library cornerstones:

Curtis Memorial Library strives
to enrich the quality of life in Brunswick by:

building community,
advocating for reading,
championing social justice and digital equity
and promoting sustainability.



Why is the library focused on these cornerstones?

Our cornerstones outline our main areas of focus over the next 3-5 years. Although they do not capture every possible aspect of our work, they highlight the key differences we want Curtis Memorial Library to make in the life of our community.

The following provides further information about why we are focusing on these cornerstones:

WHY building community?

- Loneliness (the opposite of community) is at epidemic proportions in today's society. Loneliness is bad for one's health and negatively impacts every aspect of an individual's life, creating a need for institutions that help address the problem. Libraries provide an antidote to loneliness because they are open and welcoming to all.
 - 1 in 5 Americans always or often feel lonely or socially isolated including many whose health, relationships and work suffers as a result. (Kaiser Family Foundation survey 2018)
 - 43% of senior feel lonely on a regular basis. There is a 45% increased risk of mortality in seniors who report feeling lonely. Loneliness is more dangerous than obesity and as damaging to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. (Health Resources & Services Administration, DHHS, 2017)
 - 30 percent of Millennials (ages 23-38) always or often feel lonely. About one in five people in this age range say they have no friends, while 27 percent say they have no close friends, and 30 percent say they have no "best friend." These numbers are considerably higher than the other generations surveyed. (YouGov.com survey - international research data and analytics group)
 - A group of doctors from Boston Children's Hospital and Harvard Medical School warned in an April 22,

2020 [commentary](#) published in the Annals of Internal Medicine that physical distancing and stress caused by the Covid pandemic, combined with rising firearm sales, could worsen the suicide crisis the U.S. has already been weathering for more than a decade.

(<https://time.com/5833681/loneliness-covid-19/>)

- SocialPro's 2020 survey of 1,228 people ages 18 to 75 predominantly living in English-speaking countries found that at least 20% of respondents from each age group polled were lonelier than usual as a result of coronavirus. Millennials were among the most likely age groups to feel lonely before COVID-19, research shows, and that's no different now; 34% of millennials in the survey said they were "always or often" lonelier due to the pandemic.
(<https://time.com/5833681/loneliness-covid-19/>)
- Community based organizations that support the development of informal relationships between neighbors are in decline. Libraries, however, still are used heavily by their communities (even during the Covid pandemic) and are in the ideal situation to provide the necessary venue for the development of community relationships.
 - Attendance at religious services is in a steep decline. One-fifth of the U.S. public – and a third of adults under 30 – are religiously unaffiliated today. (Pew Research 2017)
 - Fraternal groups such as the Lions (off 12 percent since 1983), the Elks (off 18 percent since 1979), the Shriners (off 27 percent since 1979), the Jaycees (off 44 percent since 1979), and the Masons (down 39 percent since 1959) have experienced substantial declines in membership. In sum, after expanding steadily throughout most of this century, many major civic organizations have experienced a sudden, substantial, and nearly simultaneous decline in member over the last decade or two. (Bowling Alone, 2001)

- Civil discourse is disappearing and social media encourages people to avoid engaging with people who think differently from themselves. However, libraries are still trusted as civic institutions and provide a safe venue where people are potentially willing to engage with “different”.
 - People are losing their trust in almost every form of government. However, nearly 78% of Americans still view libraries and librarians as trusted sources of information. (Pew Research 2017)
- Curtis Library is uniquely suited to focus on community building because it already has regular access to so many community members of many different demographics. By creating a physical space and programs that encourage interaction and discussion, the library promotes the seamless evolution of community.

The library is already a core component of the social infrastructure of Brunswick. The social infrastructure of a community consists of the physical places and organizations that shape social interactions, help build relationships outside of work and home, and turn communities from vague fuzzy concept into a real, lived experience. These organizations are where people of all types can meet and mix. They make us feel connected and supported versus isolated and alone.

- In 2018-19 Curtis Library averaged 910 people walking through its doors every day.
- Since 2008-09 Curtis has had over **3.1 MILLION library visits**.
- Even during the 2020 pandemic, when curbside service and 1.5 days of in-building-browsing are being offered, the library’s services have been quickly embraced and used by the community.

WHY advocating for reading?

According to a 2010 Perceptions of Libraries study from OCLC, books remain the brand of the public library. Simply put, when people surveyed for the study think of the public library, they think book. In 2010, 75 percent of Americans associated libraries with books, up from 69 percent in 2005.

- Libraries always have been about books, reading, and ideas. While the above study is from 2010 there has been no indication that the connection between libraries and books has changed. It is so fundamental to a library's identity that it will likely never disappear, although other core roles for libraries are always evolving to meet new community needs.
- In the past libraries have been transactional. We provided the books for reading but did not help people make those books (or reading) part of their lives. Today we seek to become a more integral, active, and useful component of our community's lives. We are perfectly situated to help people make books (in whatever format) part of how they live.

*The typical readers' advisory service is currently a passive approach. Librarians wait for people to ask us for help. Even the word "advisor" is revealing: we offer advice. But imagine if librarians shifted from thinking about readers' **advisory** to something more like reading **advocacy**. What if we started hitting the streets, getting out in the world, and talking to people about reading and how it transforms lives? What if we spent more time advocating for the value of reading?* By Danielle Borasky, Vice President, NovelList

Why is reading important and something that needs an advocate? Here are just some of the reasons:

- Reading is the teacher who is always available. A large percentage of Brunswick and Harpswell's children will be doing at least a portion of their learning at-home in the fall of 2020 and possibility throughout

2021 because of Covid. The library can remind our community that even though the world has narrowed because of the COVID pandemic, it can open back up through books and reading.

- Teaching young children to read helps them develop their language skills.
 - Reading is how we discover new ideas and information.
- People who read throughout their lives experience slower memory declines which makes for a healthier community.
- Reading provides insight into our past which in turn has an impact on our future
- Reading boosts imagination and creativity.
- Reading increases our empathy by giving us the opportunity to understand how someone else thinks.

WHY championing social justice and digital equity?

Curtis Library is a boundary spanning organization with deep roots across much of the community. Curtis librarians are uniquely situated to see a need in one part of the community, identify resources that can address that need in another part of the community and then make the connections to facilitate interactions between the need and the resources.

- While we are not “in the business” of solving social justice issues such as food insecurity or homelessness, we **are** in the business of connecting people, resources, and information to support the work of individuals and groups who can find answers. By making connections across the community, we spark and champion this work.

However, Curtis Library can go beyond connecting to become a radically inclusive library. *A radically inclusive library goes beyond inclusion. It seeks out and works to diminish and, ultimately, **eradicate** systemic barriers. It asks difficult questions, amplifies voices, and magnifies talents.* By Margo Gustina and Eli Guinnee

Empowerment is the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights. By supporting others in their search for information, ideas, and connections, Curtis librarians play an active, vital role in the process of community and individual empowerment. This a job that libraries have always done for their communities and most likely will remain a core component of their community “resume”.

Librarians are in the knowledge business because they believe in the power of knowledge. They believe that knowledge empowers people, individually and collectively. They believe in the power of knowledge to build, sustain and transform communities. They believe in the power of knowledge to give people a voice. (Rethinking Public Library Services in Hull)

- Inequalities in our society are increasing. Access to information and learning for all ages is one of the most powerful tools to combat inequality and, as such, is a key focus for Curtis Library.
 - Income inequality in the United States has hit its highest level since the Census Bureau started tracking it more than five decades ago, even as the nation's poverty and unemployment rates are at historic lows. (U.S. Census Bureau)

WHY promoting sustainability?

- Curtis Library agrees with and supports the following statement from the American Library Association:

We support sustainability as a core value of librarianship. This consists of identifying practices that are environmentally sound, and economically feasible and socially equitable. Libraries play an important and unique role in promoting community awareness about resilience, climate change, and a sustainable future. Libraries should endeavor to lead by example by taking steps to reduce their environmental footprint.

- Curtis Library also agrees with the following American Library Association statement and is working to make it a core component of the work done by Curtis:

We cannot afford to be passive or neutral. We find ourselves contending with disruption on all fronts—political, social, economic, technological, and environmental. Fully participating in community life through the pursuit of our professional values has never been more critical.

But there is one thing we all have in common, and it's very big: We all live on planet Earth. We all rely on one another to have healthy air, clean water, and enough natural resources to help guarantee food security, economic vitality, and social equity.

Climate disruption is real. Depletion of natural resources is happening. Unequal access to healthy ecosystems and built environments is the norm. In 2014, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of the United Nations and World Meteorological Association identified that we have reached a point in our history when it is no longer about saving the Earth, but surviving it.

Our only hope is to work together to survive what is happening and what will come next, primarily because we don't know what will come next. We can try to guess, or we can focus on developing resilient communities. Places where people know and respect one another. Places where solutions to common problems can be found, with the library serving as an exemplar, catalyst, and convener.

- In 2020 the science is becoming clearer and clearer. The earth is getting warmer and every individual and organization needs to take action to avoid disaster. Libraries can play an important role in this process by providing accurate information, sparking discussion about the issue, and ensuring that library buildings themselves are as green as possible.

Since the mid-1990s, the Arctic has been warming faster than any other region of the planet: currently, at least two and a half times as fast. (Last year, average air temperatures were about 3.5 degrees Fahrenheit, or 1.9 degrees Celsius, higher than the average from 1981-2010.)

The science is clear: The world is warming dangerously, humans are the cause of it, and a failure to act today will deeply affect the future of the Earth.

NY Times – Climate 101

How our cornerstones will be built

Building community

Strategy: Continue to plan for the future best-use of the Curtis Library building, with strategies to be put into place when the building is reopened to the public and community members can use the building without constraints.

The goal of the planning is to ensure that, post-pandemic, Curtis Library will return to being a vibrant, welcoming, inclusive, and evolving public space that contributes directly to making Brunswick a desirable destination for living, working, and recreating.

- Create comfortable, inviting spaces in the library that encourage the development of informal communities e.g. seating for parents in the children's play areas.
- Build flexibility into the library's physical space so that the building can be easily, quickly, and inexpensively repurposed, based on need.
- Continue to grow the library's endowment so that funding will be available to support the evolution of the physical library in the future.
- Regularly ask patrons to rank our space on friendliness, usefulness, attractiveness, and comfort and ask for suggestions for improvement.
- Periodically assess trends in library spaces and determine where those trends align with the needs and demographics of our community and how we might use them.
- Encourage the use of library spaces by community organizations.
- Continue to create spaces in the library that encourage experiences (e.g. the children's play space) as a way of bring people into the library and creating an environment where they want to spend time.

Strategy: Explore how virtual community building is being done successfully throughout the pandemic.

- Many library resources are being concentrated online. To understand if these resources are being accessed by the community, regularly collect data and assess use.
- Identify other libraries nationally/internationally that are doing viable, virtual community building. Develop best practices.
- Explore how organizations outside the library profession doing virtual community building and what Curtis can learn from them.
- Develop a strategy to keep community groups (crafting, genealogy, history, etc.) engaged at Curtis throughout the pandemic even though meeting in person may not be possible.

Strategy: Use outdoors placemaking (reimagining how to use the library's exterior spaces) as a way to safely engage and gather the community during the pandemic.

- Explore and create outdoor events that the community can safely attend and library staff can safely execute.
- Research how Scandinavian countries have community events all year long outside, especially in the winter, and how Curtis Library might do the same so that winter is not lost to community building during the pandemic.

Strategy: As appropriate, given Covid, develop community-building events in the library and/or virtually to support the library's role as a center of community in Brunswick.

- Identify, explore, and execute program ideas that will enhance and expand the community building work of the library.
- As possible given staffing start to broaden adult program offerings to ensure the inclusion of single adults (Millennials) and seniors/retirees. Both groups are particularly struggling with the isolation of the pandemic.

Strategy: Continue to focus on providing outstanding customer service both in person and virtually to ensure that all community members understand they are welcome and supported at Curtis Library.

- Ensure that customer service is part of yearly training for all staff members.
- Develop and implement a library-wide model for all employees to problem solve with customers on their own initiative.
- Develop a touchpoint evaluation of library patron interactions with Curtis and determine how to improve each touchpoint.

Strategy: Work with community partners to expand the scope of what the library can do in terms of community building.

- Identify new areas of interest for community exploration e.g. brown tail moth management, crafting, music, etc. and provide teaching, programs, and tools to support exploration and learning.

Advocating for reading

Strategy: Be a leader in making Brunswick a community of readers of all ages.

- Providing a stimulating environment (as appropriate given Covid) for children and families that encourages the five early literacy practices of talking, reading, singing, writing, and playing.
- Maintain a core collection of traditional reading materials and ensure its excellence as well as accessibility and relevance for all age groups (adults, teens, youth and their caregivers).
- Explore and deliver new reading formats, guiding those interested in the new changing forms of reading.
- Providing virtual programming to support reading; virtual book groups, online book reviews, online readers advisory
- Continue to explore ways of funding a book delivery vehicle to enhance the library's ability to deliver reading/support to all parts of the communities it serves.
- Research the availability of reading throughout Brunswick and Harpswell. If there are areas where reading materials are not available to those without transportation, explore reading (in multiple formats) might be provided.
- Expand outreach to senior communities, based on their interests.

Strategy: Use data to better understand Curtis Library readers

- Evaluate what data that is available can help us understand our readers better.
 - Look at circulation and demographic data, patron acquisition requests, ILL requests, hold requests, RA data, surveys of patron interests, data about which book displays perform well, which books are constantly out, etc.

Strategy: Actively and regularly promote the Curtis Library collection

- Develop a marketing plan that specifically supports the library collection throughout the year, for all ages.
- When possible, given Covid restrictions, get **outside** the library to promote the collection – go where the Curtis readers are.

Championing social justice and digital equity

The Library is not just a resource. It's a community. Libraries provide a safe place for individuals of all ages and backgrounds and for difficult discussions on social issues. Our nation's libraries serve all community members, including people of color, immigrants, people with disabilities, and the most vulnerable in our communities, offering services and educational resources that transform communities, open minds and promote inclusion and diversity. From Libraries Transform (ALA) 2020

Strategy: Be a community catalyst by identifying social justice issues that interest or of concern to the community and develop programming that addresses those issues, working with community partners whenever possible.

- Continue to initiate and host community conversations and book discussions on social justice issues, particularly: housing, food insecurity, and social justice.

Strategy: Connect community members who share an interest in the same social justice issues and support them with space and resources so they can explore, learn, and take action on their own

Strategy: Continue to build inclusive library collections.

Strategy: Examine library and community policies using a social justice lens and adjust accordingly.

- Develop a diversity, equity, and inclusion policy for Curtis Library.
- Provide Curtis staff with anti-bias training

Strategy: Continue to embed librarians in the community.

- Continue to ensure that librarians continue are embedded in the community in a variety of ways (committees, partnerships, etc.) that will help them develop a network of contacts and support for the library.

Ensuring up-to-date, digital access to all members of the community is a critical component of supporting social equity in our community.

Strategy: Ensure the library is providing quality digital resources that are accessible to all members of the community.

- Establish a set of standards for technology purchases at Curtis, identifying the technology categories that need to be:
 - Cutting-edge and highest quality
 - Average quality - need to perform but don't have to have every bell and whistle
 - Inexpensive - will likely need to be replaced rapidly or the technology will change so you don't want to invest a lot of money.

Fund technology purchases according to this matrix.

- Ask the community on a yearly basis their perception of technology at Curtis with the goal of making sure we are providing appropriate access to current technology.
- Explore how the library can expand access to broadband in less well served areas of our service populations such as Harpswell.

Strategy: Provide technology support and education according to each community member's needs.

- Ensure that library staff are skilled in using and explaining relevant consumer technologies and that the library's technology is able to meet the evolving needs of the community.
- Track the development of relevant, new consumer technology devices and software to identify those that may be of particular value or interest to library patrons.
- As staffing allows expand Tech Wizard work in the community.
- Develop ongoing technology programming (virtual and in-person) around topics relevant to our community, changing and adapting as needs change.
- Develop a media creation lab at Curtis with the focus of serving local small businesses, entrepreneurs, and other creative and curious community members.
- As staffing allows provide technology related outreach services to senior living communities.
- Provide access to web-based training for all of the software products offered in the building.

Promoting sustainability

Strategy: Provide the information, programming, and support to encourage the sustainability of the library and the community.

- Promote community awareness among all ages about resilience, climate change, and sustainability through the reading collection, programming in and out of the library, and participation in community sustainability committees.
- Provide programming that teaches “ancestral life skills” and supports “living lighter on the planet” such as cooking, sewing, knitting, repairs, growing and processing food, building soil, and living thriftily.
- Publicize what Brunswick and Harpswell as communities are doing to understand the impact of climate change and identify/publicize what citizens can do to support that work.
- Help citizens understand what they can do to support sustainability.

Strategy: Continue to identify how to support “green” practices at Curtis Library to reduce the library’s environmental footprint. Advocate for the financial resources to implement those practices and promote them as they occur.

- Research how the library can put solar panels on its roof
- Develop funding to support putting an electric car charger at the library
- Continue to explore how to expand the library’s use of biophilia to increase the health and well-being of those who use the library

Curtis Memorial Library
Board of Directors 2020

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