

Athol Public Library

LONG RANGE PLAN OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

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FY2012-FY2017

Going Green from the Ground Up!

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Approved by the Board of Library Trustees 25 August 2010

MISSION STATEMENT

The Athol Public Library serves as a vital community center that connects people of all ages in a friendly and helpful atmosphere with resources that enrich, educate and entertain.

VISION STATEMENT

Responding to the needs of an evolving population, the Athol Public Library will be the first and best choice of the community for information and inspiration in an environment that is accessible to all.

INTRODUCTION

The Athol Public Library has historically had a long range plan that is regularly updated each year, relishing each goal reached and moving new ones to the fore front. Last May, we decided the time had come to determine if we were still on task and in synch with what the community wants to see in their library services. We also wanted to investigate and integrate new technologies and innovations with an eye toward future service. In addition, we are putting the finishing touches on the building program so that we can apply for state construction funds to finally renovate and expand our library. Many of the patron, staff and building needs will be addressed by this welcome prospect.

To this end and after much input, this document was created to cover the period from Fall 2011 through 2016. It is meant to be a fluid document, updated as needed and responsive to the desires of the people served by the library.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As with all library planning, many opinions are needed to create the document necessary to guide a library in developing the services essential to its own particular community. All ideas, grand and practical, mesh together to breathe life into a workable plan for the future. I would like to thank all those individuals who gave of their time to ensure that their library understands and is committed to this future vision. It is my vision to take those ideas and with the help of our community, renovate and expand our beloved library to take us forward for the foreseeable future.

Special thanks to the following for their contributions to this document:

- The Board of Library Trustees
- The Staff of the Athol Public Library
- The Friends of the Athol Public Library
- David Ames, Town Manager
- ATAC (Athol Teen Advisory Council of the Athol Library)
- The many residents who came to the focus groups and completed our survey
- Barbara Friedman, Consultant, Focus Group Leader
- Enil Alicea who tallied and compiled the surveys
- Athol Daily News
- AOTV (Athol Orange Community Television) Bulletin Board

Thank you all for your valuable input – your support is appreciated!

Debra A. Blanchard, Library Director

EVOLUTION: OUTLINING THE PROCESS

The Library Director with approval from the Library Trustees, selected the publication The New Planning for Results: a Streamlined Approach by Sandra Nelson for the American Library Association as the primary tool for conducting this study.

Prepare: Planning to Plan

Because we anticipated conducting a number of focus groups, meeting with community groups and carrying out a town wide survey, it was decided that the Director would work with the staff, Friends of the Library, Town Manager and Library Trustees and compile the final document. Having over 35 years experience at the Athol Public Library and writing the previous plan and updates, it was believed this was the most efficient way to proceed. Barbara Friedman was hired to conduct the focus groups. A potential survey was compiled by the Director who then solicited comments from the staff and trustees. The final survey was distributed at town meeting, at the library and other various outlets around town. It was also available on our website for the first time. Enil Alicea, a college math major and employee of the Athol Credit Union, spent many hours assembling and collating the surveys to create a cohesive picture to work with.

Envision: Imagining the Future

Questions asked of the many citizens addressed their vision for the future of library service in Athol. Good conversation in the focus groups held in April and May 2010 identified many issues and comments generated on the written survey added more. Because we are struggling along with the building program process, the trustees and director continued to make visits to new and renovated libraries to envision our new facility. Many library directors with beautiful new libraries were so generous with their time and advice. Janice Lanou, former director of the Wheeler Library in Orange, was hired to work with Building Committee members Debra Blanchard and Carol Ambrozy to get the building document done. Roe Waltos was invited to visit and talk about the process in the spring of 2010. The Director and members of the board have also attended sessions on fundraising, building projects and MBLC sponsored workshops to motivate and encourage us along the way.

Design: Inventing the Future

As stated in the above section, the Mission Statement grew out of the same process as the Vision Statement. Our mission reflects the dialogue that occurred through written and verbal statements from the community as to their thoughts for the future of library services. This also drove the selection of the service roles that we are challenged to fulfill.

Build: Assembling the Future

Based on a review of the information gathered during the fact finding stages, the director developed the goals and objectives for the library throughout the summer of 2010. The draft was presented to the Library Trustees and Staff for further comment and final approval on August 25, 2010.

Implement: Moving into the Future

While the ideas of a community can be gleaned and recorded, the economic reality must also be taken into account. Some of the goals involve additional funding and mechanisms, such as grant writing. Each year the Director and the Library Trustees will develop a plan of action to include perusal of other avenues of financial support to accomplish the tasks at hand.

Communicate: Inform the Community

The library has attempted to involve and inform the community at each stage of the process. The plan as approved will be distributed through a variety of channels to make it accessible to all groups and individuals. Copies will be presented and explained at various town boards such as the Selectmen, Finance Committee and Planning Board. We typically use several methods of media delivery from the newspaper, radio and local community television to get the word out to the town residents. As always, library staff will be available to listen to and document customer's comments and suggestions for future revisions. We have always used our website to post documents of this type for 24 hour access for the public, but the staff also now maintains a Facebook page and Twitter account to appeal to another segment of our population.

Evaluation and Update

This five year plan which was accepted and approved by unanimous vote of the Board of Library Trustees at their summer meeting, will guide and direct our activities and actions as outlined in our goals which include measurable objectives. The Director is responsible for monitoring the evaluation processes and assisting the staff in conducting such evaluations. Any results will be reviewed by the Board of Library Trustees and discussions with the Director as to appropriate action will be held. An annual examination of the successes and failures of the Long Range Plan will occur and from this, the Annual Plan of Action will be adjusted. A report will be issued to the community outlining the results.

The Community of Athol

"We love our town"

Physical Characteristics

The Town of Athol is part of Worcester County, and is located in the North Quabbin region of north central Massachusetts. The town lies between the picturesque Tully Mountains to the north and the Quabbin Reservoir to the south. It is bordered on the southwest by New Salem, on the west by Orange, on the north by Royalston, on the east by Phillipston, and on the southeast by Petersham. Athol lies 38 miles north of Worcester and 71 miles west of Boston. Athol's 32.34 square miles support a population of 11,299. The population density is 349 persons per square mile.

The soil of Athol is rough and stony, and the terrain is wooded and hilly, with elevations ranging from 500 feet at the edge of Millers River to 1282 feet at the top of Pratt Hill near the Bearsden Forest. The Millers River is Athol's most significant waterway and flows through the downtown area from northeast to west.

History

Five families first settled in an area named "Pequoiag" in September 1735. When the township was incorporated in 1762, the name was changed to Athol. John Murray, one of the proprietors of the land, chose the name because the hills reminded him of his ancestral home of Blair-Atholl, Scotland. "Athol" means "pleasant place."

Early residents subsisted on agriculture and hunting. By 1791, Athol had four grist mills, six sawmills, a fulling mill, and a shop with a trip hammer, all of which were operated by water power. The Athol Cotton Factory, built in 1811, was one of the first industries to serve a market beyond the local one. Through the 1800s, textile, leather, wood, and metal industries further expanded the market for goods produced in Athol. The construction of the Vermont and Massachusetts Railroad in the 1840s fostered so much industrial growth that a second line connecting Athol and Springfield was constructed in 1870. Construction of the Fitchburg Railroad, an east-west line, came through Athol in 1879, on its way to the Hoosac Tunnel and the Berkshires.

The Athol Machine Company was established in 1868 in order to manufacture a chopping machine invented by Laroy S. Starrett. In 1881, Mr. Starrett established the L.S. Starrett Company, known for making quality precision tools. The company remains the town's largest employer to this day, and thus does Athol live up to the nickname "Tool Town."

As industries developed along the river valley, homes and stores grew up around the common located on the hill southeast of the factories. This area, today called "Uptown," was the location of the first bank. The first trolley lines, established in 1894, ran from Athol to Orange, and additional lines soon provided efficient transportation to surrounding areas. Because of its development of industry, commerce, and transportation, Athol was the center of activity for the entire area at the turn of the century.

During the 1930s, the trolley lines closed due to the increased use of private automobiles, bus service, and the generally difficult economic times. When four Swift River towns were flooded to create

the Quabbin Reservoir, the Springfield railroad route had to be abandoned. Consequently, Athol's growth leveled off as commerce became increasingly dependent on the interstate highway system. Population reached a peak of 12,186 in 1955.

The Route 2 bypass of Athol was constructed in the 1950s, further limiting direct access to the downtown business district. The following years showed population decline, falling to a low of 10,634 in 1980. However, Athol's population has risen gradually since that time and shows every indication of growing. It will be interesting to see the results of the 2010 Federal Census.

Government

Municipal government is by open town meeting and governed by charter. Athol is divided into three precincts. The first Monday in April is the date for the annual town election. The annual town meeting is held in June, and a fall town meeting occurs in October. Additional town meetings are held as needed. Administration of the town's business is carried out by a five-member elected board of selectmen and a town manager following the Town Charter, which was passed in 2000. Other important town boards are the FWAC (Finance and Warrant Advisory Committee), the Planning Board, the Conservation Commission, the Historical Commission, the EDIC (Economic Development and Industrial Corporation), and the Zoning Board.

The Athol Fire Department and Athol Police Department provide fire protection and public safety. In addition, a Massachusetts State Police barracks is located in Athol near the high school. The Department of Public Works takes care of roadways, water works, sewage treatment, parks, and cemeteries.

The towns of Athol and Orange cooperate with each other as neighbors, in spite of the county line that divides them. Some service providers for Athol are based in Franklin County, even though Athol sits in Worcester County. Several important meetings have been held in the last year, spearheaded by Athol Selectman Philip King, to regionalize services in the North Quabbin (nine town) Region. The Library is one of the departments being examined for this venture.

Population Characteristics

The 2000 census lists Athol's population at 11,299. This reflects a slight decrease (1.3%) from the 1990 census figure of 11,451. The figure is likely to rise, for, while new building has slowed down considerably due to the recession, people are relocating here from the eastern part of the state due to the incredibly low housing prices.

Athol's residents are of varied ancestries, including French, Yankee, Irish, French Canadian, Italian, German, Polish, and Lithuanian. Minorities (Hispanics, African Americans, and Asians) make up less than 5% of the population. The median age in Athol in 2000 was 38.6 years.

80% of Athol's residents are high school graduates. Only 17% have college degrees. The median household income was \$33,475 in 2000. While the median house value was \$87,100 in 2000, the average cost to build a new single-family home in Athol was \$133,100 three years later. Many residents do not work in Athol. The average commute to work takes 24.6 minutes.

Communications

Athol has its own daily newspaper, *The Athol Daily News*. In addition, the *Worcester Telegram and Gazette*, the *Greenfield Recorder*, and *The Gardner News* cover Athol events and news. Newspapers from Boston, Springfield, and Fitchburg are also sold in local stores. The library also carries the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*.

Time Warner Cable provides service to 6,646 subscribers in the Athol-Orange area. 4,044 live in Athol. The two-town area also benefits from the work of the Athol-Orange Community Television, Inc. (AOTV), which is a nonprofit cable casting corporation. AOTV trains people to produce their own local TV programs, and it records and airs public meetings and events through the Time Warner system. There is a store front between Athol and Orange, however all management functions and personnel were moved to Albany New York this year as a cost saving measure.

WJDF 97.3 FM and WAHL 99.9 FM are the local radio stations in Athol and Orange. Additional broadcasting from Gardner, Greenfield, Keene (NH), Springfield, Worcester, and Boston can be heard.

Broadband and DSL is spotty in the Athol/North Quabbin Region. Services such as Verizon and Time Warner Cable provide this service but outlying areas use dial-up access numbers based in Petersham, which is a local telephone call from Athol as broadband is not available yet. Many area residents with dial up frequent our library for downloading large files or to speed up their work process.

Transportation

Though residents can often walk to businesses in the downtown and uptown districts, Athol is primarily dependent on the automobile for out-of-town transportation. Route 2A runs through Athol's business districts and provides access to Orange to the west and Gardner to the east. Route 2 provides access to Greenfield (30 miles to the west), Gardner (15 miles east), Fitchburg (25 miles east), and Boston (71 miles east). Worcester is 34 miles from Athol via Routes 32 and 122 in Petersham. Keene, New Hampshire, is 25 miles north via Route 32.

Athol is served by several bus lines. The Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA), based in Greenfield, has daily runs from Athol to points west. The Montachusett Area Regional Transit (MART), based in Fitchburg, can take residents to points east of town. Community Transit Service buses provide dial-a-ride service for those people in Athol, Orange, and Winchendon, who are in need of transportation to work, medical appointments, shopping, or other errands.

An active freight rail line runs through Athol however it does not have a stop here. To connect with a passenger rail system, Athol residents can go travel to Fitchburg (a 30 minute ride) to catch the trains of the MBTA, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, which serves the Boston metropolitan area. Amtrak stations are located in Amherst, Springfield, Worcester, and Brattleboro, Vermont.

Pilots and passengers of private planes can access the nearby Orange Municipal Airport. Athol residents who intend to fly long distances generally commute to Logan International Airport in Boston or to Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks, Connecticut, which is south of Springfield.

Economic and Commercial

Athol's economic climate has changed drastically since its own post-Civil War industrial revolution. A number of the large brick factory buildings along the Millers River are now vacant or in only partial use. The L.S. Starrett Company continues to be the major employer in town, but some of its unskilled laborers relocated to its North Carolina plant years ago. The Athol Memorial Hospital is the next largest employer. Other significant workplaces are Quabbin Valley Healthcare, Pexco, Whipps Incorporated, Vegetation Control Services, Niagara Cutter, Girardi Distributors, Athol Daily News, Castine Movers, and Hannaford supermarket.

In the early 1980s, the state targeted the North Quabbin region (and principal towns Athol and Orange) for funding to promote economic development as the area had the highest unemployment rate in the state. Small cities grants and other government funding provided a promising start of economic growth until a recession hit. At that time, several large and small Main Street businesses closed.

Citizens of the two towns formed alliances to work together at revitalizing the area. The Orange-Athol Industrial Development Commission began in the 1960s to bring businesses to the area near the Orange airport. The Millers River Community Development Corporation, North Quabbin Housing Partnership, and a banking alliance also grew out of collaborative efforts. These groups succeeded in financing housing to middle-income residents, natives and others who were not accepted by traditional lending programs.

Retail and wholesale businesses, generally stretching along Main Street and Route 2A, provide most of the remaining jobs in town. The downtown business district features shops, banks, eateries, and an Ocean State Job Lot store. A new Senior Center is under construction next to Ocean State. The uptown area provides restaurants, convenience stores, a bank, a CVS pharmacy, and a local bookstore. A McDonald's restaurant and a convenience store sit at the main intersection west of the town center. The Athol-Orange border on Route 2A features two small shopping plazas, a large grocery store, and a lumber store. A Wal-Mart store is another mile further toward the Orange town center.

Athol residents, who wish to take in a big-screen movie, eat at popular chain restaurants, or shop at large department stores must travel to Gardner, Fitchburg and Leominster, Amherst and Hadley, Greenfield, or Keene, N.H.

Education

The Athol-Royalston Regional School District educates young people from grades pre-K to 12. Three elementary schools serve Athol students only: the Pleasant Street School (K-5), the Riverbend School (K-5), and the Sanders Street School (K-3). A Royalston Community School (K-6) serves children who live in that town. The Athol-Royalston Middle School consists of grades 5 to 8, and the Athol High School is made up of students in grades 9 through 12. District enrollment for the 2009-2010 school year was 1,700 students. Interested individuals may attend the Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School in Fitchburg on a tuition basis, subject to the approval of school authorities.

The closest community colleges are Mount Wachusett Community College in Gardner and Greenfield Community College in Greenfield. Programs leading to a Bachelor's degree and higher courses of study can be found in Amherst, Fitchburg, Worcester, and Keene, N.H. A few students choose to further their education at institutions elsewhere in New England, around the country, or online.

Private day care centers and nursery schools provide stimulation and social learning opportunities for the young child. Each week, the Athol Public Library holds several preschool activities which invite caretakers and small children to visit the library, play with educational toys, read or hear stories, do crafts, and interact with others. The Athol Area YMCA also schedules activities appropriate for children ages 6 months through kindergarten, and operates a preschool and nursery school, as well as after-school daycare.

Culture

Athol is geographically isolated from the major cultural centers of Massachusetts; consequently, its residents tend to create their own entertainment. Productions and programs are initiated by such organizations as the Athol Area YMCA, the Athol Historical Society, the Athol-Orange Rotary, the schools, and the Athol Public Library. The Athol Cultural Council provides funds for some of these programs.

Since the Athol Public Library has inadequate facilities for seating, its largest annual program is presented in conjunction with and at the home of the Athol Historical Society. The adjacent Town hall is also used but lacks air conditioning and has poor acoustics. The Friends of the Athol Public Library also provide funds for smaller programs held at the library, like young adult craft workshops and author visits and book-signings.

In the summer and early fall, "Tool Town Live!" weekend concerts are held in the Uptown Common and at Fish Park in the western part of town. Begun in 2004, this popular series features talented groups from around New England who represent a variety of musical genres. The concerts are offered free of charge, supported by car washes and other fund-raisers held earlier in the year. The Friends of the Library sell soda and chips to raise money and also to promote awareness of the library.

The Athol Historical Society, a group of private citizens, occupies the old town hall in the uptown area. The building houses a museum exhibiting articles from Athol's storied past. Additionally, the society sponsors talks about local history, provides guided tours of historic sites, and holds special events. The L.S. Starrett Tool Museum, located at the company office, has on display machine tools of the past. Visitors are admitted by appointment only, made with the personnel department of the company.

Nearby, the Fisher Museum of Forestry at Harvard Forest in Petersham features dioramas portraying the history of central New England forests. The North Quabbin Natural History Museum is located on the second floor of the Orange Historical Society building in Orange.

Recreation and Entertainment

Athol and its surroundings offer unlimited opportunities for enjoying the outdoors. Clubs like the Woodsman Rifle and Pistol Club and the Athol Bird and Nature Club focus on specific outdoor interests.

Some of those activities center around the Millers River. The River Rat Race, an annual canoe race held each spring, draws participants from all parts of New England. The six-mile race begins at Cass Meadow in Athol and ends at Hachey's Landing in Orange. This event attracts a large crowd of observers and usually features a parade and a carnival.

Six historic public nature areas are administered by the Athol Conservation Commission. The largest of these is Bearsden Forest in the northeastern part of Athol. It contains hiking trails, camping areas, bridges, paths, old quarries, ponds and brooks. Plans are also underway to create a greenspace / biking trail between Athol and Orange.

Eco-tourism and supporting environmental interests are popular throughout the North Quabbin region. The Millers River Environmental Center is located in a former elementary school building on Main Street. It offers exhibits and events and is also the home of the Athol Bird and Nature Club. Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, based in Athol at Skyfields Arboretum, protects significant natural, agricultural, and scenic areas and encourages land stewardship in North Central and Western Massachusetts for the benefit of the environment, the economy and future generations. Organizations such as these help to preserve the beauty and natural resources that bring people to the Athol area.

The southern part of Athol, bordered by the Harvard Forest and the Quabbin Reservoir, offers some of the most beautiful hiking trails in the area. The town owns Fish Park, Silver Lake, and Lake Ellis, where people can swim, skate, play tennis, or play ball.

Athol has additional recreational facilities. The Ellinwood Country Club offers an 18-hole golf course, banquet facilities, and a clubhouse for its members. The downtown Athol Area YMCA includes an Olympic-size pool, racquetball courts, gyms and workout equipment. Courses are offered in sports skills and practical arts. A Y-sponsored camp for local children, Camp Wiyaka, is located just across the border in New Hampshire.

Recreational activities for children and young adults are provided by the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. The Athol Recreation Department sponsors summer programs for youths at local school playgrounds. Social and fraternal organizations such as the Athol Women’s Club, the Elks, Lions Club, Rotary, Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Masonic Lodge, offer a wide range of activities for families and individuals.

Group Facilities

Four municipal auditoriums are available for large group events in Athol. They are:

	Seating	Location	Parking	Acoustics & Visibility
Middle School	400	Uptown	Good	Excellent
Memorial Hall	525	Central	On-street + lot	Poor
Liberty Hall	300	Central	On-street + lot	Fair
High School	642	Uptown	Good	Excellent

Churches, lodges, and the Athol Area YMCA have facilities for small group functions. The library has an activities room available at no charge, however it must be used during the hours the library is open. The library is located at the same intersection as the town hall and the YMCA. A parking lot is behind the library, and another municipal lot is a block behind the YMCA building. Otherwise, parking is available along the streets however, patrons complain continually about not being able to find a parking spot to use the library.

Churches

A variety of churches serve area residents. Two Catholic churches are here. The Church of Our Lady Immaculate was originally “the Irish church,” and Saint Francis of Assisi Church was “the Lithuanian church;” but those distinctions are no longer stressed.

Protestant churches include the Congregational, Baptist, Episcopal, New Testament Church, North Quabbin Bible Church, United Methodist, Unitarian Universalist, Salvation Army, and Seventh Day Adventist. Temple Israel serves the Jewish community in Athol and nearby towns. Each church offers a wide range of activities for its members in the form of religious education, Bible study, choirs, and social groups.

Social Services

Historically Athol has had many publicized social problems, and several local organizations are still on hand to remedy these situations. Chief among the problems are high rates of unemployment, teenage pregnancy, domestic violence, and alcoholism.

The Athol Memorial Hospital provides hospital care, screening clinics, educational classes, home nursing care, out-patient counseling and a sleep clinic. A medical arts facility is located directly behind the hospital.

The North Quabbin Community Coalition operates from a storefront on Main Street and is funded by state and federal dollars. Its membership is derived from local agencies, churches and organizations and is committed to providing a forum for sharing, advocacy, legislative lobbying efforts and to avoid a duplication of services. This coalition has been a model for the development of other similar initiatives around New England. Its task forces focus on such issues as child abuse, teen pregnancy and lack of affordable housing to come up with some real solutions. One of its members, the Literacy Volunteers of Orange / Athol, provide free, confidential and private one-to-one tutoring for improving reading, writing, and math skills.

Children and families are served by additional agencies with Main Street offices. Athol-Royalston Community Partnerships for Children maintains an informational resource center for parents and a link to the Title I program in the schools. The Greater Athol Area Advocates for Families with Special Needs administers family support services for those who have a family member with a developmental disability.

The Athol Council on Aging, in conjunction with Franklin County Home Care Corporation, provides hot meals, clinics, transportation, and recreational programs for the elderly. Three local housing complexes provide apartments specifically for senior citizens.

The Catholic Social Services trains and employs homemakers to assist in homes where care is needed. An interfaith council made up of ministers, priests and other religious leaders provides spiritual counseling and advocacy. It currently runs a Food Bank as does the Four Square Church on Main Street in Athol.

LIBRARY DESCRIPTION

The Athol Public Library *"We love our library"*

Library service in Athol dates back to 1830, when the Athol Social Library offered books to local readers. Between 1850 and 1860, the Athol Agricultural and Mechanical Library served various groups. Area churches also maintained their own small libraries to serve the members of their congregations.

On November 13, 1878, an organization calling itself the Athol Library Association was formed. To this early group the Athol Public Library is directly related, for in 1882, the association offered its book collection to the town on the condition that municipal funds be appropriated to provide housing for the collection and to purchase additional books. In April 1882, the town voted to accept these resources (1063 books) and appropriated \$300 to support the new Athol Free Public Library. A library committee of five to seven elected members oversaw the institution until 1886, when the number of committee members was established at six.

This first public library was located on the second story of the home of Joel M. Doane, 268 School Street, and Mrs. Doane served as the librarian. Under town management, the library soon outgrew "the front parlor up one flight." In 1887, the committee leased Mr. Doane's vacant barn and hired as the librarian his daughter-in-law, Mercie S. Doane. The library was moved to the barn, the Dewey Decimal system was adopted, and a card file was developed. By the turn of the century, the committee considered those quarters inadequate and vowed that no additional materials would be purchased for that location. Library patronage declined accordingly.

At that time, Wilson H. Lee of New Haven opened negotiations with Andrew Carnegie to fund a new library building. Mr. Lee had grown up in Athol and still had an affection for the community. Though Carnegie offered the town a \$15,000 grant, and Lee had gotten a \$1500 private pledge to buy a parcel of land, the townspeople refused the deal.

The library still needed a new home, preferably one that was closer to the business district of Athol. Space opened up in the Academy of Music building on Exchange Street; the collection was moved into it, and the library opened for service on December 5, 1903. Mantie R. Hinman became the librarian. This new site offered shelves open to the patrons, a separate children's section, and a new charging system. Local appropriations remained low in comparison to library funding in surrounding towns, but circulation of library materials increased. Book deposit stations in South Athol and at Miss Grace Pitts' store uptown were established for a short time in an effort to reach more of the public.

In 1914, local businessman Laroy S. Starrett generously leased land on which to build a new library. Wilson H. Lee again opened negotiations with the Carnegie Corporation. Two years later, the town of Athol accepted a \$22,000 Carnegie grant to erect a free public library building. The new library was turned over to the town on August 16, 1918. Designed by W.H. & Henry McLean of Boston, the library was built in a simplified Classical Revival style by Fellows & Ducworth Co., Inc., of Brookline, and follows one of the floor plans suggested by the Carnegie Corporation. One large room on the main floor contained the collection and accommodated all the patrons. A hardwood floor was laid in the downstairs hallway at the expense of L.S. Starrett. The main floor featured an historic fireplace mantle from the old Humphrey

residence in Dorchester, the site of the birth of the first ordained minister in Athol. A large grandfather clock was donated by Wilson H. Lee.

Several librarians served in the new library until Gladys Greene was appointed head librarian in 1927. Miss Greene served tirelessly for the next thirty years, promoting service to children by offering summer reading programs and school book deposits, and initiating plans for a separate children's room at the library. In 1953, Miss Greene saw her plan become reality, for in that year the ground-floor children's room was dedicated in her honor. That space, originally designed as an assembly hall with stage, had been occupied by the local Red Cross chapter since the library opened in 1918. Miss Greene resigned as head librarian in 1957.

As library needs have increased, a number of physical improvements have been made to the original 1918 structure. To provide increased space, a two-story addition was built onto the rear of the library in 1965. It included rest rooms, a staff lounge, and enlarged reading and stack areas. The library was the first Athol town building to have air-conditioning, which was added in 1969, using library trust funds. In 1978, the ground-level storage room was renovated and turned into a multi-purpose room, which today continues to serve as an activity room for events for all ages. The library became handicapped accessible in the late 1980s; a designated parking space and a rear-entrance ramp were created in 1985, and an elevator, handicapped rest room, and children's entrance ramp were added in 1988. Those amenities pre-dated the 1990 passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, demonstrating the commitment of a forward-thinking library board.

Library staff members have always responded to community demand for services. To meet the growing need for children's services, Myrtle Scribner was appointed the first full-time children's librarian in 1965, and that position remains full-time today. A Friends of the Library group was chartered in 1980, and this group is still active today. In the early 1990s, circulation and cataloging of library materials became computerized. Internet access for patrons began in 1995. Teaching public computer classes using a wireless lab began in 2001. In 2004, the "On the Same Page" reading initiative began and has continued to this date. The library continues to offer a wide variety of children's, young adult and adult programs. Many are or were funded with grants received from IMLS through the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners and the Friends of the Athol Public Library.

Eight head librarians / library directors have served the Athol Public Library since Miss Greene's time: Elsie White (1957-1960), Alice Newton (1960-1976), Elise Dennis (1976-1978), Ronald Latham (1978-1981), Mary King Cross (1981-1985), Christine P. Rose (1985-1988), Arlene Jacobs (1989-1990), and Debra Blanchard (1990-present). Together with a caring, dedicated staff and the fine people who serve as Trustees, these individuals have helped the library become one of the busiest small-town libraries in Massachusetts.

Administration

The constitution of the Athol Public Library names the Board of Library Trustees as its governing body. Two of the six trustees are elected each year for three year terms, and the Board elects a chairman and a clerk each year. The Director serves as the executive secretary. Responsibility for library management, collection development, and provision of library services to the public is delegated by the Board to the Library Director. The Director is appointed in accordance with the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners regulations, is directly responsible to the Athol Board of Trustees and is an employee of the

town of Athol. The Board maintains institutional memberships for the library in the American Library Association, the Massachusetts Library Association, and the Massachusetts Library Trustees Association.

Under its bylaws, the Board meets once a month, except in July and August, unless additional meetings are needed. The November meeting is devoted to budget planning for the coming year. All meetings are posted and held under the Open Meeting Law.

The powers and duties of the Board are:

1. Serve as strong advocates to promote library interests.
2. Establish policies.
3. Repair and maintain the physical facility.
4. Recommend pay salaries of employees.
5. Replace employees as needed, with the approval of the Town Manager.
6. Review the budget annually with the library director and present it to the Town Manager.
7. Distribute state aid funds.
8. Manage trust funds and endowments.
9. Suggest an interim replacement for a departing Board Member to the Town Manager.

The Athol Public Library Board has endorsed the American Library Association Bill of Rights. They also update written job descriptions for all full- and part-time positions and policy statements to recommend to the Personnel Board, Town Manager and Union. Salary grades for employees are determined by the union contract and are voted upon at the annual Town Meeting.

Personnel

The Athol Public Library employs a director, an assistant director, a children's librarian, two full-time technicians, four part-time technicians, two part-time high school pages, one substitute, and a part-time custodian. The number of FTEs is 8.8. Brief descriptions of the job requirements for permanent full-time employees follow.

The position of Library Director is a professional supervisory position that requires a master's degree of library science from an American Library Association-accredited graduate library school. It requires administrative and supervisory experience. The Director is responsible for management of all aspects of library services in conformity with policies established by the Library Board of Trustees, the regulations of the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, the bylaws of the Town of Athol, and the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Director is responsible for planning, organizing, staffing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting of all library services. S/he is also responsible for grant writing and

building maintenance. The Library Director is under separate contract with the Town Manager and is placed at Grade 15 on the town's salary scale.

The position of Assistant Director is a professional supervisory position that requires a bachelor's degree, with a master's degree in library science preferred. A paraprofessional certificate of librarianship and a general understanding of the various phases of library operations are also necessary. The position involves assisting the Director with planning, implementing, and managing library services in accordance with established principles and policies of library operation, local policies and procedures, and pertinent local, statewide, and national laws, regulations, and practices. In consultation with the Director, the Assistant Director is particularly responsible for programming, providing computer classes, managing volunteers, overseeing and providing reference services, training and supervising staff, and for day-to-day management of the library. S/he also serves as Acting Director in the Director's absence. The Assistant Director is classified at Grade 11 on the town salary scale.

The position of Children's Librarian is a professional supervisory position that requires a college degree, with additional coursework toward a master's degree in library science or study in juvenile literature or elementary education. A paraprofessional certificate of librarianship and a general understanding of the various phases of library operations are also necessary. The Children's Librarian is responsible for the overall operation of the children's department. Duties include: conducting and coordinating public service to children and their families, day care providers, and school groups; developing and maintaining quality programs and collections of children's materials; cataloging and circulating library materials; providing reference service; training and supervising children's staff; and managing the children's department. The Children's Librarian is classified at Grade 9 on the town salary scale.

Each of the two full-time technician positions requires a high school diploma supplemented by college coursework and appropriate experience, though a bachelor's degree is preferred. The positions involve performing specialized public service, circulation, cataloging, interlibrary loan, library-related clerical, technical, and computer-related duties, in support of the effective operation of the town library. The Library Technicians are classified at Grade 7 on the town salary scale.

The library also employs three part time technicians who provide important support services in the adult and children's libraries. These positions require a high school diploma and some college. Part time Library Technicians are classified on Grade 4. Substitute technicians are classified on Grade 3. There are also two high school pages, one for each department and a computer aide who services the many staff and public computers along with the in house file server and network.

Physical Description

The Athol Public Library is located on Main Street near the downtown shopping area and is convenient to the business district, factories, residential areas, and the town offices. A parking lot is located to the rear and side of the building and is accessible from Island Street. Several other public parking lots are within walking distance. Metered parking spaces are available along Main Street.

Three entrances lead patrons into the approximately 7,000-square-foot building. The original front door entry faces Main Street and has high granite steps to reach the main floor. A rear entrance with a handicapped ramp and automatic doors can be reached from the rear parking area. The children's entrance also features electric doors and has handicapped accessibility from ramped sidewalks that link it to both the

Main Street sidewalk and the rear parking lot. Doorbells for after-hours entry have been installed at the front and back doors. An elevator connects the main floor and the ground floor for ease in transporting equipment or patrons who cannot navigate steps. The library has three rest rooms: two on the main floor near the computer area, and a handicapped unisex facility in the elevator vestibule on the ground floor.

The main floor houses the adult and young adult collections and includes a casual reading area, a reference area, public computers, a stack area, director's and assistant director's offices, and a combination staff office / workroom / kitchen. All of these areas are congested and difficult to negotiate in and around.

The front left section of the main floor is the reading area. It is furnished with one round table with chairs, two long tables with chairs, and one upholstered reading chair. Periodicals, current newspapers, mysteries, audio-visual collections and mysteries are shelved here. The public copier, microfilm reader and local newspaper reels are housed here, too. Beyond this reading area and separated from it by the biography shelves is the reference area and the beginning of the large print shelves.

The main thoroughfare at this level contains three round tables and chairs. The circulation desk appears on the right-hand side; behind it are the staff offices and workroom. Beyond the desk is the Business and Career Center, with one reservation computer, two catalog computers, and eight public access computers available for patron use. These computers were a grant from the Gates Foundation and are energy efficient Studio Hybrids. To enter the general fiction and nonfiction stack area, one must proceed through the doorway to the rear of the building. Across from the circulation desk an area was created using an LSTA grant for teens. This teen space is heavily used by young adults and also by adults during the day who also like the bright new furniture.

Each of the library's collections is housed on shelves that are jam-packed. Acquisition has reached the limitation of the facility, and one item must be discarded for each new one added. The general fiction and nonfiction shelves are stacked close together and are not ADA-compliant. Only 26 chairs are available for patrons who wish to sit and read with only two of those being comfy easy chairs. The main floor of the library is in desperate need of expansion for shelf space, seating capacity, and ease of traffic flow.

The ground floor of the library houses the children's room, the archives, the activities room with kitchen area, and utility spaces.

Shelves around the perimeter of the Gladys Greene Children's Room contain fiction, nonfiction, picture books, chapter books, and audio-visual items for young children. Three tables with 8 chairs accommodate visitors and their parents. One catalog computer and three patron access computers are available for use. A play area next to the circulation desk offers games and toys. Off to one side of the room is a small staff office / storage area. A storage area that used to house holiday materials located under the front steps of the building is no longer habitable due to water damage. The children's room is in need of increased seating capacity, shelf space, storage space, and dedicated space for activities.

Just down the hall from the children's room is the Kate L. Fay Archives Room. More than 400 books of local and regional history are kept there. Included are town directories, town reports, and street lists. Patrons who wish to use this locked room on their own must register at the circulation desk on the main floor. The local town historian Richard Chaisson has left his extensive local history collection in his will. Any renovation or new construction must take this sizable collection into account.

The Martha T. Talcott Activities Room is the next room along the hallway. Named for a former library trustee chair, this room is used for programs for all ages. The kitchen area was renovated in 2005 and is a commercial kitchen. There is a small amount of room for storage. The wireless computer lab is housed here and can be set up for computer classes. Shelves of discarded books in the hallway represent an ongoing book sale, sponsored by the Friends of the Library. This room is heavily used and is often not available for the many programs that the library sponsors.

A former janitor's closet is now a computer server room, located across the hall from the activities room. The boiler room is accessible from the children's staff office. Additional storage is found next door in Town Hall in a space known colloquially as "Library East." Holiday decorations, circulating artwork, bound volumes of old newspapers, and little-used general supplies are housed here.

The library features a security and fire alarm system which connects directly to the Fire Station and an outside security firm. There is no fire suppression in the building.

Finances

The Athol Public Library is financed with municipal appropriations. State aid and the accumulated interest from a number of endowments are used for larger projects. Trust fund interest has restrictions as to its use and is not used for routine library expenses.

Prior to the recent economic downturn the library was already suffering from budget woes (as were other town departments). With the current recession, it has become even worse and we have struggled for the past two years and now into the third to maintain our certification. The typical work-week for an Athol town employee was cut from 40 hours to 37 hours. During the past decade, the library has seen a reduction in both open hours and staffing due to diminished funds. In November 2009 when the assistant director accepted another position, the town manager instituted a hiring freeze. The loss of this position has been very difficult on the staff and has resulted in delays in service to the public. The good news though is that through attrition and combining of other positions, the assistant's position has been filled. It is only 30 hours though and we have lost some part time hours to do it, but the feeling was that the resulting increased level of responsibility and experience will offset this. While state mandates are still being met for a library of this size, any further cuts could likely result in loss of certification of the Athol Public Library.

The Friends of the Athol Public Library provide about \$5,000 annually to purchase videos, support programming and cover other miscellaneous expenses.

The library has a strong history of seeking grants to fund programs and services not normally provided through our regular budget. Almost all of our computer equipment and technology has been purchased through grants such as the Gates Foundation and Niagara Cutter.

Collaborations

The Athol Public Library was a member of the Central Massachusetts Regional Library System. With the consolidation of the Region, we anxiously watch to see how we will be impacted. Our library relied heavily on CMRLS for guidance, materials and workshops. A regional van makes daily deliveries to the library and this is one of our most popular services.

The Athol Public Library was fully automated in 1989 using the Follett Software System and has grown from two computers to a sophisticated network of 35 workstations utilizing a Windows 2003 server. The server will be replaced shortly and will feature a Windows 2010 platform. In 2009 we upgraded from Follett Circ/Cat in house to Follett Destiny, a web based product. In addition, we manage our own web site with an in house staff person serving as the web master.

In 1993, the Athol Public Library became an online affiliate member of C/W MARS. Central / Western Automated Resource Sharing, Inc., is a library consortium dedicated to efficient resource sharing and rapid access to information. It networks more than 140 libraries in central and western Massachusetts and provides an easy interlibrary loan method among them. While affiliate members have access to the information and the network, they do not circulate materials directly through C/W MARS. Annually the library Trustees consider membership in C/W MARS but the price tag of \$27,000 annually versus \$1,000 for Follett cannot be justified by the Finance Committee.

In spite of its location on the border of two counties, the Athol Public Library maintains a good relationship with the other town libraries in north central Massachusetts. Librarians from outlying smaller towns may choose selections of books on tape, DVDs, and videos to borrow on a long-term loan basis. We help to promote programs at area libraries by posting flyers and being knowledgeable about regional events. A number of our regular patrons also use other libraries in the area and understand the strengths of each one. Museum passes are loaned to patrons in good standing with no restriction on residency. Because of its size and variety of materials, the Athol Public Library is an important resource to both the libraries and residents of surrounding towns.

The children's room and young adult staff do their best to meet the needs of area students, especially knowing that all of the local schools do not have staffed libraries or certified librarians. Upon teacher request, the librarians host student visits for library orientation, book selection or instruction; visit classrooms to promote reading or the library; provide deposit collections for classroom use; supply suggested reading lists; place materials to meet assignments on reserve; and put summer reading list titles on reserve shelves for easy browsing. Library staff may help school staffs and parent-teacher organizations with projects in the school libraries. They organize Community Reading Day for children in grades K-8 and arrange for 'local celebrities' to participate. Library staff also keep students in mind when making book purchases so that the public library can meet many of the needs of this audience.

Athol's Friends of the Library group was organized in April 1980. Dues range from \$5.00 for individuals to \$100 for sustaining members. The group's income is derived from dues as well as from book sales of discarded library materials and special fund raisers. The income is used to support many library programs and projects. Members who actively participate in the Friends have remained basically the same since its inception, and a membership drive could be started to recruit newer members.

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR LIBRARY SERVICE

Administered through the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, Massachusetts General Laws lay out the foundations for minimum library standards. The Code of Massachusetts regulations 605 CMR 4:00 address the requirements for basic provision of library services by population group.

The minimum standards for Athol are:

- ✚ Be open to all residents of the Commonwealth.
- ✚ Make no charge for normal library service.
- ✚ Be open a minimum of 40 hours per week, including some evening hours.
- ✚ Employ a library director with a professional degree from an approved library school and professional certification from the MBLC.
- ✚ Spend a minimum of 16% of the total annual budget of books and other materials.
- ✚ Extend borrowing privileges to holders of cards issued by other certified public libraries.
- ✚ Appropriate municipal funds for library service which is at least 2.5% above the average library appropriation for the last three years.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

I. The Space We Live In

Athol Public Library collections and staff provide services in a building that was renovated in 1965 with an intended life span of twenty years. While we have been diligent about maintaining and upgrading each year, demand for meeting and programming space has far outstripped the available room. We don't fit anymore. Technology has placed an additional burden on the infrastructure, requiring wiring and electrical stressors on an outdated structure.

Over 350 people per day enter the library via three doors creating wear and tear on the facility. Our stack area is not ADA compliant, although access into the building is excellent with two handicapped entrances featuring electrified push button doors, an elevator and also a handicapped bathroom.

In addition, the stack area is so crowded that we must toss a book when we buy a book. Ideally we would hope to leave the top and bottom shelves vacant and interfile oversize materials with regular items.

With transportation problems and an isolated rural community, the library stepped into the void to provide community meeting and greeting space. Programs of culture and entertainment offered give the residents choices close to home. Serving as a community center is vitally important to the staff and trustees, as citizens have requested this service often.

II. User Needs

While our library has always been a busy place, with the downturn in the economy, we are busier than ever. In one year circulation has increased by 28%. Patrons are telling us that they are giving up Internet service and either using our computers or bringing laptops to hook to our wireless. Families are flooding the library to take advantage of programs instead of taking vacations or going out of town for entertainment. Our program attendance has increased in 10 years from 4,808 to 7,791. Last year we had 438 young adult, children's and adult programs – all in one program room. This leaves little or no time available for community groups or town committees who would like to use the room. It must also be used during our limited open hours.

Which brings us to the highest request on our recent survey and focus group responses, that we remain open longer hours and on Saturdays. As stated earlier, staffing is the answer yet we continue to lose

staff in the budgeting process. The staff is meeting soon to figure out if there is some way that we could accommodate at least being open four hours on Saturday.

But the dilemma is that just as customers are demanding more from the staff and the facility, the budget continues to shrink, most of it in the personnel line items.

III. Who We Want to Be

While we have accepted the charge to function as an informal center of our community, the reality is that we have not been able to fully perform to expectations due to lack of funding year after year and an acute deficiency of adequate or appropriate space.

Focus groups and surveys have indicated strongly the need for afterhours community meeting space. A safe place where people of a variety of organizations can meet on neutral territory without need of staff availability. An outside secure entrance with the ability to close off the building would solve this problem.

In an ideal world (or close enough to be achievable), the library would have separate program areas for children, young adult and technology training. Each would feature age appropriate furniture and accessories. Each would have enough staff to attend to their needs and provide programming. Citizens would turn to us first for all their information needs, the library naturally coming to mind as their best choice for a solution. It is time to see how we can make that happen.

PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE RESPONSES

All of the information gathered from the community must now be placed into a set of goals, objectives and action or activity statements. Appropriate service responses must be selected based on the expressed needs of the residents. What is a service response? To quote the The New Planning for Results: a Streamlined Approach by Sandra Nelson, page 146, *“In simple terms, a service response is what a library does for, or offers to, the public in an effort to meet a set of well-defined community needs.”*

There are thirteen service responses to select from and they are:

- Basic Literacy
- Business and Career Information
- Commons
- Community Referral
- Consumer Information
- Cultural Awareness
- Current Topics and Titles
- Formal Learning Support
- General Information
- Information Literacy
- Lifelong Learning
- Local History and Genealogy

Although the Athol Public Library does offer some facets of each response and needs were expressed that fell within every category, with continuing budget reductions, tough decisions must be made as to how our energies and resources are expended. Based on the various data collected and analyzed, the following four are appropriate for Athol at this crossroad.

- Commons
- Current Topics and Titles
- General Information
- Lifelong Learning

Focus on Service Response :

Commons

The Athol Public Library is literally at the heart of the community. Physically it is located in the nest of downtown, across from the other bustling hub of activity – the local YMCA and also adjacent to the Town hall. The library provides meeting room space to the community and activities for young and old to connect people with each other.

Recent events that captured the interest and participation of residents included our annual “On the Same Page” programs, this year featuring “The Orchard” by Adele Robertson and our IMLS grant “How Green is Your Library” which featured over 30 programs on energy efficiency, sustainability, recycling and many other green topics.

Limitations to realizing the full potential of the library as a community center revolve around money, space and time. Goals and objectives were fashioned, however, as if we were fully funded with the idea that grants and benefactors can always be solicited and the eternal hope that the economy will improve.

Goal 1: The library reacts to stated user needs and responds appropriately.

Objective 1: Improve the library's hours to include Saturday hours during the school year to fulfill demand evidenced in focus group and survey results by FY11.

Objective 2: Improve the library's hours to include extended evening hours to fulfill demand evidenced in focus group and survey results by FY12.

Objective 3: Research every avenue to make new building a reality so that stated concerns like a larger area for teens or more shelving space can be realized by FY14 (ongoing).

Goal 2: The library is recognized by the town as a center for community activities and meeting arenas.

Objective 1: Design and seek funding to create meeting/program/performance space with access to bathroom and kitchen facilities that could be utilized by groups during hours the library is normally closed by FY13.

Objective 2: Design and seek funding to provide private and small group meeting room space for conferences, tutoring and quiet study by FY13.

Objective 3: Provide dedicated space to house the computer lab for group and individual instruction by FY12.

Objective 4: Increase membership in the Friends of the Library by 10% through publicity materials and direct solicitation by FY11.

Objective 5: Continue to provide a community wide reading initiative with programs of interest to the community related to the selected book (ongoing).

Objective 6: Continue to streamline procedures to allow the Trustees, Director and library staff to meet the criteria and deadlines set by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners in order to receive available state and federal funding (ongoing).

Goal 3: Athol residents will have ADA compliant library facilities and services.

Objective 1: Full access to a library building and services for all users by FY13.

Goal 4: Users of the library will have safe outside access into the building and enjoy attractive surrounding landscape.

Objective 1: Establish a subcommittee of Trustees and staff to make recommendations on enhancing the grounds for both safety and esthetic reasons by FY11.

Objective 2: Investigate surrounding properties for possible purchase as additional parking locales by FY11.

Goal 5: The library will have a dedicated program room for children with storage space and child safe features and furniture.

Objective 1: Design and build a child friendly room devoted solely to children's programming by FY12.

Objective 2: Provide child friendly bathroom facilities for preschool through grade five in a safe, accessible area by FY13.

Goal 6: The library will have a dedicated space for young adults and their services.

Objective 1: Continue to provide after school activities, between programs and homework support (ongoing).

Objective 2: Design and build an enclosed area for teens to meet with friends in an area that allows some noise that won't disturb other areas by FY14.

Goal 7: Patrons will have 'Help Desk' available to assist them with technology needs.

Objective 1: Provide more training for staff or recruit qualified volunteers to assist patrons with questions on their laptops in the library or at the public workstations (ongoing).

Objective 2: Create office hours when patrons can get assistance with their computer related needs from software to troubleshooting by FY12.

Objective 3: Create training workshops for area organizations, businesses or non profits using our mobile computer lab by FY12.

Objective 4: Design a video conferencing studio that would be bookable by businesses and residents by FY14.

Goal 8: The circulation desk will have adequate room for easy access by all patrons and staff.

Objective 1: Configure circulation area to include at least two staff workspaces with tools such as computer, telephone and storage of files by FY13.

Objective 2: Organize circulation area for faster customer service by arranging shelves, drawers, etc. so that items are only a step or fingertip away by FY13.

Objective 3: Supply enough checkout stations (self or full serve) by FY13.

Objective 4: Provide adequate standing and seating space for customers to comfortably inhabit the area around the circulation desk by FY13.

Focus on Service Response :

Current Topics and Titles

In conjunction with the Commons theme, the Athol Public Library seeks to make available exciting new materials from best sellers to the hottest movies and provide a forum for people to discuss them. A monthly Mystery Discussion group and Popular noon time book discussion group continue to have a good attendance and are enjoyed by participants.

Physical distance from cultural attractions also plays a huge role in our importance as a provider of entertaining and informative programs for adults and children.

Being designated by the state as a disadvantaged community demonstrates the real need for the library to provide materials and services for the many low income residents. Unemployment is historically higher than the state average but services to address this are located at least a half an hour's drive. The library tries to assist by providing computers and access to a high speed Internet connection as well as basic computer skills classes.

Because of the remote physical proximity to larger metropolitan areas with their corresponding services and attractions, the Athol Public Library has sought numerous grants over the years to provide access to print and online information to assist residents in their knowledge and skill pursuits.

Residents typically need current information on how to do it projects, job searching skills, health, education and governmental agencies to name just a few. Many need staff intervention to fully utilize the tools we provide. To assist those working from home, we developed and maintain daily, a website chock full of useful information. We have received many, many requests for quiet study rooms from small home

businesses to meet with clients, from students wishing to work on group projects and from people just wishing for a bit of quiet in an open noisy library.

Goals and objectives concentrate on renewing the resources currently available to allow citizens the opportunities they would be afforded in a larger communities.

Goal 1: Users will have easy access to a wide selection of popular materials in a variety of formats, including emerging formats.

Objective 1: Improve or replace display units for exhibiting new materials by FY13.

Objective 2: Increase funding for duplicate copies of high demand materials by FY12.

Objective 3: Continually monitor the media for new technologies and formats as they hit the market and discuss at staff meetings to get ideas for ways to include them (ongoing).

Goal 2: Customers will have current and update to date services available to satisfy their knowledge pursuits.

Objective 1: Investigate funding and support to become full members of CWMARS by FY14 to allow patrons comprehensive access to the range of benefits available.

Objective 2: Revamp phone system to include TYY, answering and menu options by FY11 for easier customer access.

Objective 3: Advertise and promote online databases available through programs, publicity materials and on the library website (ongoing).

Goal 3: Non-English speaking residents of town will have a range of services available in their native tongue.

Objective 1: Identify ethnic groups residing in Athol for language areas in need of materials and generate title list by FY12.

Objective 2: Seek funding to begin building a collection of identified language(s) by FY12.

Objective 3: Provide programming of interest to the identified groups in their native language by FY12.

Goal 4: Library users will have adequate physical accessibility to the collection.

Objective 1: Complete application to the MBLC to get on the state list for library construction.

Objective 2: Prepare a report to town boards and the general public outlining recommendations to improve building conditions and methods of funding such by FY07.

Goal 4: The library staff and staff recognizes and responds to the fact that the library serves a wide variety of ages in providing materials and services on current topics.

Objective 1: Provide a room for young adults to congregate, attend programs and house materials and technology by FY14.

Objective 23: Increase the hours and responsibilities of the Children's Assistant Librarian for additional programming and reader's advisory by FY13.

Focus on Service Response :

General Information

Being everything to everyone – that’s our motto! While we certainly would like to be, with the economic picture what it is, we try to cover the widest base with a little taste of something. Materials purchased are aimed at a general audience, with specialty items offered through our crack jack interlibrary loan librarian. Such importance is placed on the provision of interlibrary loan at the Athol Public Library, that one librarian devotes nearly full time to it with three others trained to take over in her absence.

High importance is placed on continuing education for the staff to keep their skills sharp to assist our many customers. We are hoping that the new regional system will provide the high quality and variety of training workshops that CMRLS did. Regional membership and state certification also allows us to offer our patrons a wide variety of online databases which we publicize heavily. Since our local school library system is woefully inadequate, with no professional librarians except in the high school (in a town of 11,299 people), the availability of these databases is critical to ‘leaving no child behind’.

Goal 1: Customer’s informational needs and requests for assistance in using technology to find resources are met by qualified, friendly and helpful staff.

Objective 1: Employ an appropriate number of proficient, experienced and welcoming personnel (ongoing).

Objective 2: Provide professional development opportunities for staff in reference techniques using traditional resources and emerging technologies (ongoing).

Objective 3: Provide customer service workshop opportunities for staff (ongoing).

Objective 4: Develop and maintain areas for staff work and break space that are separate and conducive for the appropriate activity by FY13.

Goal 2: The library facilities allow quiet individual study areas along with small group workspace.

Objective 1: Publicize the newly created room in town hall for use by library patrons for programs or meetings.

Objective 2: Seek funding to implement renovation or construction that would provide an expanded facility that would incorporate quiet study rooms by FY13.

Goal 3: The library meets patron needs for information in all formats.

Objective 1: Provide adequately funded budget line items for identified formats (ongoing).

Objective 2: Encourage staff to keep abreast of emerging technologies (ongoing).

Goal 4: Library staff will provide assistance and training on computer equipment and resources to library customers.

Objective 1: Provide training opportunities so that all staff are equally equipped to assist customers (ongoing).

Objective 2: Offer one on one (ongoing) or classroom instruction (bi monthly schedule) for patrons on using computer technology and online tools.

Focus on Service Response :

Lifelong Learning

The ability to continue learning upon leaving the formal school setting is one of the most important functions of a library. Every other service response relates to this one, as curiosities and needs arise from the desire to learn more. That's where the library comes in! From providing young children with interesting story hours to foster the love of reading to directing a senior citizen through the maze of genealogy research in the Archives collection, the library aids and supports people in their quest for knowledge.

Goals and objections in this area relate to increasing the materials available, customer service training and skill enhancement for the staff and providing adequate space for self directed study.

Goal 1: The library will collaborate with schools and homeschoolers to familiarize children and young adults with services offered and make them feel comfortable in a library setting.

Objective 1: Conduct at least four school visitations (ongoing).

Objective 2: Create an informational brochure to distribute to home schooling families by FY11.

Objective 3: Distribute a letter to teachers informing them of new services and materials at the beginning of the school year (ongoing).

Goal 2: The library will provide an adequate number of computers and a variety of reference materials as requested by customers.

Objective 1: Increase the number of staff hours to provide additional assistance with computers, whether one on one or in a classroom setting by FY12.

Objective 2: Monitor condition and usage of equipment to keep on a maintenance, replacement and new acquisitions schedule (ongoing).

Objective 3: Collaborate with Senior Service America to provide an aide for seniors to get one on one assistance with using the Internet by FY11.

Goal 3: The library will maintain a secure, climate controlled area, with appropriate shelving and storage for the library's genealogical and local history materials.

Objective 1: Request Capital Improvement Committee funds to make room climate controlled by FY12.

Objective 2: Replace shelving with approved archival shelving by FY13.

Objective 3: Increase square footage of archives storage space by 100% to house bequest by local historian upon his death by FY13.

ACTION PLAN

ACTIVITIES FOR: FY2012

COMMONS

- Work with our Owner's Project Manager and Architect to apply for and implement the MBLC Construction Grant round.
- Meet with staff to brainstorm ideas for coverage to open 4 hours on Saturdays.
- Get approval from Town Manager and Trustees to implement new schedule.
- Continue to advocate with Finance Committee to restore funds for improved hours.
- Start and maintain a library blog for community input on the building plans and progress.
- Produce a television program for AOTV about the library building related to services.
- Organize an introductory meeting with young adults to recruit members for Junior Friends.
- Search out and apply for available grant funding for goals and objectives listed.

CURRENT TOPICS AND TITLES

- Investigate storage solutions for DVD and blue ray discs.
- Create an email list of patrons to receive our newsletter.
- Propose a new monthly column in the local newspaper to highlight library activities.
- Develop a short monthly newsletter to be distributed throughout town.
- Utilize the local community TV station to promote the library services.
- Provide opportunities for staff to learn more about emerging technologies and current ones as well such as Wikis, Blogs and social networking.

GENERAL INFORMATION

- Provide opportunities for the staff to attend workshops and trainings through the new MLS Region.
- Complete building program and get on the state construction list.
- Hire a qualified OPM and architect to assist in the design.
- Complete the BLC grant application.
- Generate promotional materials to distribute to area residents outlining the building process and create avenues for people to get their questions and concerns heard.
- Establish a solid base of support through the Friends for attendance at the annual town meeting for passage of the warrant article to move the building project forward.
- Conduct a survey of other libraries to determine how they are circulating items like the Kindle, Nook, etc. to see how we might do that.

LIFELONG LEARNING

- Continue the newly created collaboration with the Athol Energy committee to provide more green programs.
- Create an informational brochure for homeschoolers.

- Distribute a 'back to school' letter for teachers informing them of new services and materials.
- Collaborate with school personnel about ways to email assignments to library staff for posting on our website.
- Hold at least three classes monthly in the computer lab on requested topics.
- Order and install new shelving for Archives room.
- Meet with contractors and specialists to provide climate control for Archives room.

Completed Action Plan items in FY10-FY11 from Long Range Plan 2006-2011

COMMONS

- Form a Library Building Committee to work with the Master Plan Committee and Needs Assessment Committee to address space limitations.
- Advertise and hire a project manager and architect.
- Form a library building committee.
- Inform the public of activities with at least one weekly article and two photographs.
- Complete a building program and feasibility study.
- Produce two newsletters (fall and spring) to be direct mailed to Friends members.
- Hold two special Friends only events.
- Select a book for On the Same Page community wide reading and related events.
- Meet with the Town Manager, Finance Committee and Capital Planning Committee to submit a warrant article for Spring town meeting for paving parking lot.
- Negotiate with local landowner for nearby parcel of land.
- Purchase and install kitchen equipment with Capital Improvement Committee funds.
- Add one additional grade at the Middle School to the book talk schedule.
- Investigate green building possibilities and energy saving features for new building.
- Become a member of LEEDS for assistance and information with the ultimate aim of being certified.
- Participate in National Grid's Advanced Building program.
- Promote the new teen space with two additional programs.
- Investigate ways to establish outreach services beyond our walls for elderly and disabled patrons.

CURRENT TOPICS AND TITLES

- Run a fundraiser to acquire adaptive technology.
- Conduct an extensive collection examination in preparation for moving into a new building.
- Create an Adult Programming Committee to develop a budget and implement programs.
- With input from the Town's new Energy Committee purchase a number of new titles on energy saving and conservation.

GENERAL INFORMATION

- Present a budget to the Finance Committee that requests at least a two percent increase in materials spending.
- Complete a needs assessment of the physical plant.
- Require staff to attend at least one workshop related to improving technology skills.
- Provide a customer service workshop in house for staff.
- Meet with new school librarian to develop ways to share resources and programs.
- Plan several in-house programs for staff to feel more comfortable with new technology.

- Replace the public computers by participating the Gates Grant program.
- Create a section on the website with links to good 'green' websites.

LIFELONG LEARNING

- Conduct four school visits to inform students and teachers of resources.
- Provide three programs for adults on topics of interest.
- Start an additional book group for adults.
- Create online links on the library website and print subject related guides for state and regionally provided databases.

RESOURCES

The Citizens of Athol.

The staff, Trustees and Friends of the Athol Public Library.

The Town Manager, Town Boards and community organizations.

Athol Economic Development and Industrial Corporation. *Athol Economic Development Plan*.
Athol, Mass., September 12, 2005.

Athol Master Planning Committee. *Athol Master Plan*. Athol, Mass., originally issued November
2002, reissued February 2004.

Caswell, Lilley B. *Athol Massachusetts, Past and Present*. Athol, Mass., 1899.

Lord, William G. *History of Athol, Massachusetts*. Athol, Mass., 1953.

Nelson, Sandra. *The New Planning for Results*. Chicago, American Library Association, 2001.

Talcott, Martha T. *Athol Public Library 1882-1972, 90 Years of Service*. Athol, Mass.,
Transcript Press, 1974.

Young, Allen. *North of Quabbin Revisited*. Athol, Mass., Haley's, 2003.

**"Whatever the cost of our libraries,
the price is cheap compared to that of an ignorant nation."
Walter Cronkite**

APPENDIX A:

**ATHOL PUBLIC LIBRARY SURVEY
CONDUCTED MAY 2010
Tabulated by Enil Alicia**

1). How often do you or members of your family use the library?

Weekly – 66%
Monthly – 18%
Several times a year – 11.5%
Once a year – 2%
Never – 15%
N/A – 1%

2). Who are you?

Male – 19%
Female – 80%
N/A – 1%

Marital Status:

Married – 43.5%
Single – 43.5%
N/A – 13%

Number of Children at Home:

0 – 18.5%
1 – 16%
2 – 8%
3 – 4%
4+ – 5.5%
N/A – 48%

Number of Year in Athol:

0-5 – 17%
6-10 – 14%
11-15 – 2%
16-20 – 4%
21-25 – 8%
26-30 – 7%
31-35 – 1.5%
36-40 – 8%
41+ – 12.5%

N/A – 26%

Employment Status:

Employed – 22.5%
Self Employed – 1.5%
Unemployed – 1%
Retired – 5.5%
N/A – 69.5%

Age Group:

Below 12 – 4.5%
12-19 – 4.5%
20-34 – 8%
35-60 – 37%
60+ – 38%
N/A – 8%

3). When is it most convenient for you to use the library?

Weekday mornings – 26.5%
Weekday afternoons – 31%
Weekday evenings – 13%
Saturday mornings – 16%
Saturday afternoons – 8%
Sunday afternoon – 4%
N/A – 1%

4). Do the hours of the library serve your needs?

Yes – 83%
No – 15%
N/A – 2%

5). What do you feel are the best hours for children's programs?

After school – 27%
Weekday mornings – 9%
Vacation weeks – 39%
Saturday – 12%
N/A – 13%

6). How would you rate CHILDREN'S services?

Excellent – 43%

Good – 20%
Fair – 1%
N/A – 36%

7). How would you rate YOUNG ADULT services?

Excellent – 37%
Good – 23%
Fair – 3%
N/A – 37%

8). How would you rate ADULT services?

Excellent – 64%
Good – 25%
Fair – 6%
Poor – 0%
N/A – 5%

9). Do you use the telephone to obtain library services?

Yes – 50%
No – 45%
N/A – 5%

10). Have you used the library website?

Yes – 58%
No – 40%
N/A – 2%

11). Have you noticed publicity in any newspaper in the last year?

Yes – 73%
No – 22%
N/A – 5%

12). How often do you use the library computers?

Daily – 9%
Weekly – 15%
Monthly – 16%
Never – 58%
N/A – 2%

13). Did you know that the Athol public library is a member of the REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM and you can borrow materials from any MA library?

Yes – 91%
No – 7%
N/A – 2%

14). Do you use the library for any of these REGIONAL SERVICES?

Interlibrary Loan – 53%
Talking Books – 6%
Patron Placed Holds – 21%
Other (List on bottom) – 2%
No – 1%
N/A – 17%

Other: C.W.MARS

15). The library personnel are helpful to me.

Always – 88%
Usually – 6%
Seldom – 0%
Never – 0%
Don't use the library – 1%
N/A – 1%

16). Why do you use the library?

- a. Borrow books/materials – 26%
- b. Locate information – 15%
- c. Borrow videos/DVD's – 18%
- d. Study/quiet place – 5%
- e. Computers/Internet – 8%
- f. Children services – 6%
- g. Young adult services – 3%
- h. For school – 3%
- i. For my job – 4%
- j. Programs – 9%
- k. Other – 2%
- l. N/A – 1%

Other:

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Pleasure | 6. Research |
| 2. Copy/Fax | 7. WSJ |
| 3. System Placed Holds | 8. Archives |
| 4. Notary Service | 9. Cert Training II |

17). If you don't use the library, can you tell us why?

- a. Hours inconvenient – 7%
- b. Can't get there – 0%
- c. Can't see to read – 0%
- d. Had a bad experience – 0%
- e. Don't know how to use the library – 0%
- f. Use another library – 3%
- g. Buy my own books – 1%
- h. Can't remember to return materials – 1%
- i. Don't have what I want – 1%
- j. Other (List on bottom) – 1%
- k. N/A – 86%

Other: Can't read a book fast enough to return it on time.
Memory loss.

18). Considering the growth, should the library facilities be expanded?

- Yes – 67%
- No – 3%
- Unsure – 16%
- N/A – 14%

19). How important is it to have the library in the town center?

- Very important – 67%
- Important – 14%
- Not Important – 5%
- N/A – 14%

20). Would you support a debt exclusion, or a long term bonding for this purpose?

- Yes – 41%
- No – 7%
- Need more info – 37%
- N/A – 15%

Comments:

- Need Saturday Hours
- Saturday AM hours would help.

- Activities at no cost.
- There are times I cannot make it to the library during these hours.
- Sometimes you have purchased books on my request and that is wonderful.
- I appreciate the delivery service of large print books/wonderful service.
- Could be improved with Saturday hours.
- I find that the Orange Library can often get me materials that Athol cannot.

APPENDIX B:

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Prepared for

Athol Public Library
568 Main Street
Athol, MA 01331-1888

June 4, 2010

Focus Groups

Athol Public Library

- Young Adults
- Staff
- Trustees, Town Officials
- One Library User Group
- One Combined User/Non User Group

Prepared by

Barbara Friedman
Westminster, MA 01473

I. Executive Summary

Methodology

Five focus groups were held at the Athol Public Library (hereafter called “the library”) on the following dates:

- April 27th Young Adults
- May 3rd Staff
- May 5th Trustees and Local Officials
- May 19th Library Users
- June 2nd Combined Library Users/Non Users

Approximately forty-five people attended the sessions. Each group was read a series of questions and the facilitator recorded and projected these answers on a screen for all participants to see. All responses are included in this report. The Preparation for Planning was done by Athol Library Director, Debra Blanchard. She prepared her Board, Staff, Committees, and Library users explaining the process and inviting them to participate in focus groups. Originally, six focus groups were planned to identify possibilities for change and determine Community Vision. Five focus groups were held: Teens, Staff, Board of Library Trustees and other Town Board Members, and two Users Groups. The focus groups were conducted by Barbara Friedman, Consulting Librarian, and held over a five week period from April 27th through June 2nd 2010. The key responses from these groups are listed under the standard PLA Services Responses and given in raw data form. After a review of the responses, the Library Director will review the responses, write goals and objectives, identify future activities, write the plan, and submit to Library Trustees and the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners.

Summary

The participants overwhelmingly like visiting the library and the staff, but feel it should be bigger, and open more hours, including evening and weekend hours. One teen expressed “space envy” saying that the adults have more space than they do, but generally space is desired for all groups and all library functions. Comments about the collection

were few, but these reflected the need for bigger collections with broader depth making it less likely to require interlibrary loan. Both the quality (no scratches) and the quantity of DVDs and CDs are important, especially to young adults.

Both young adults and staff agreed that a larger teen space where young adults could be noisier is important. Comfortable seating, more storage space and shelf space for books, more computers, sturdier step stools, and less clutter in the history corner are seen as needs. The staff is viewed positively for their dedication and friendliness; however both staff and the public see a need for more staffing, continued training, especially in technology, and the reinstatement of the Assistant Director's position.

What has changed in the Athol Public Library in five years? The level of service has remained high. The staff commitment to strengthening the community is solid. Trustees, Town Officials, and Library Users recognize the quality of service, but also consistently identify the library's needs: space, shrinking staff, and limited hours.

Trustees are well versed in these needs and are articulate in discussing these with Town officials. They are also aware of potential looming issues of decertification, neighboring libraries being decertified, and the challenges of a building project.

Although the solution to all of these problems was identified as more money, increased funding depends on public support. The groups clearly identified a need to connect with community businesses, and town, state, and federal officials to solve these funding issues.

All groups felt that the staff was sensitive to the pulse of the community and responded to needs. Programming was mentioned as a strength of the library with the variety and frequency of programs being important to both adults, young adults and children.

Participants expressed belief that there was significant support for the library, but competition from other demands of the community, apathy, and the economy were threats to the building process, the re-establishment of the Assistant Director position, and extending hours.

In the last five years, the Athol Public Library has increased its level of service for young adults through staff efforts, grants (USDA & LSTA), and volunteer efforts.

The Library has an impressive young adult program, a teen advisory board (ATAC), and staff committed to this population.

Although the Athol Public Library faced many of the same issues five years ago, namely space, hours, and funding, focus group attendees more easily defined solutions: grants, partnerships, networking, lobbying, and fundraising.

The Director has moved the building process forward. In 2005, the Library was granted a planning and design grant for \$20,000, half of a \$40,000 project and is committed to continuing to seek a library construction grant.

The focus group attendees expressed a desire for a larger library, and many expressed a desire to keep the ambiance of the old building. A list of reasons for keeping the library in the center of town were given, which included the mutually positive relationships with businesses in the downtown area, transportation issues, and a sense of tradition.

The concept of an "ideal library" varied from participant to participant, but there was universal agreement on the need for more space for library staff, for storage, for programming, and for the collection. Quiet space and noisy space (young adult area and children's areas) were mentioned as important needs, as well as expanded services, including more library hours.

The overall impression given by participants is that Athol Public Library is a thriving, vibrant, essential service in town, now used by more people than ever. Increased service, technology, and lack of funding have put a strain on the staff, but they continue to offer great service.

The “dislikes” or suggestions for change expressed don’t neatly fit into categories. They are listed here, but are also found in the group comments.

Only one person per computer
Hours (Closing time is too early)
Not open weekends
Only “fine free” day is Wednesday.
Adults have a bigger space
Need a bigger selection of movies (DVDs)
Want people to be accountable for scratched DVDs.
Need a scratch remover for CDs and DVDs (they know it is expensive)
Teen space is out in the open...in the back would allow teens to be a little louder
A private space
Don’t like people that steal things: Alarm the books to prevent loss.
Comfortable seating
More shelf space for books
More and sturdier Step stools
Less clutter in the history corner
Needs more shelf space
Like to get more books in the library vs. Interlibrary Loaning
More historical, non-fiction
More medical books with new concepts
Balanced collection of political thought
More computers
Library should be for serving the community, including student needs
Stay open later than 5:30 (especially for workers and those who commute out of town)
Open on Saturdays
More volunteers to keep the library open

GROUND RULES FOR PARTICIPANTS

This is an opportunity to participate in a forum for positive change. Use it, and have fun with it!

1. There are no right or wrong answers. It is not necessary to reach a consensus.
2. Participate in the discussion; express your opinions, examples, and ideas freely yet briefly.
3. Give others your attention. Limit side conversations and interruptions.
4. Be open-minded and respectful of your colleagues.
5. Engage in discussion, not argument. Stay positive!
6. Allow others to voice their opinions and ideas.
7. Stay focused and on topic.

Focus Groups are not to be used for:

1. Personnel issues
2. Conflict resolution
3. Consensus building
4. Attitude modification
5. Numerical data gathering

GUIDELINES USED BY FACILITATOR

1. Warm up as participants arrive, give each person the handouts and their nametag, and offer refreshments.
2. Start on time.
3. Preliminaries - introductions, review time frame and confidentiality of process.
4. Review the participant ground rules.
5. Conduct the focus group. Record brief comments and perceptions when possible.
6. Sessions are limited to 90 minutes (no break).

7. Conclusion and thanks at the end of 90 minutes.
8. Ask each question in turn; do not review the list of questions with the focus group participants beforehand.
9. Help participants to feel comfortable and relaxed.
10. Encourage different perceptions and points of view. Promote debate.
11. It is not necessary to reach a consensus. Draw out different opinions.
12. Try to keep the discussions on a positive track - what people want rather than what has not worked, what they do not like.
13. Try to keep the discussion flowing. Ask for examples or additional details where needed.
14. Keep the discussion focused and on track.
15. Encourage participation by everyone. Prevent the discussion from being dominated by one or two people, and try to get quieter people to talk; for example, you might want to go around the table.
16. Remind participants of ground rules, if necessary.
17. Keep time frames in mind so that all questions can be covered within the allotted time.
18. Help participants to conclude discussions and make smooth transitions to the next question.
19. Remain neutral - do not show approval or disapproval for ideas.
20. Avoid giving personal opinions.

LIBRARY SERVICE RESPONSES

1. Be an Informed Citizen: Local, national, and world affairs. Residents will have the information they need to support and promote democracy, to fulfill their civic responsibilities at the local, state, and national levels, and to fully participate in community decision-making. *Attendees talked about the Library being open consistent and longer hours than the Town Hall or other Town agencies. They also stated that the Library provided public access computers with a wifi connection, and information could be obtained by consulting a staff member and / or searching a computer.*

2. Build Successful Enterprises: Business and non-profit support. Business owners and non-profit organization directors and their managers will have the resources they need to develop and maintain strong, viable organizations. *Attendees talked about cooperative efforts between the library and businesses in town that could forge partnerships. The library provides support in the form of reference services and helps other agencies with their informational and promotional needs. It was noted that the library staff is willing and able to provide support to other town agencies whenever asked. Many times focus group attendees mentioned the relationship between the Y and the library. The relationship between the library and town officials, local businesses, and especially the Y, seems to be a strong reason for keeping the library in the center of town when a building plan is developed.*

3. Celebrate Diversity: Cultural awareness. Residents will have programs and services that promote appreciation and understanding of their personal heritage and the heritage of others in the community.

Attendees mentioned programming offered on many different subjects. The amount of programs and the choice of speakers were considered to be evidence that the library staff was willing to tap any resource to develop programming and knew that there were many different interests in the community. One focus group attendee gave examples, mentioning that cooking programs drew a very different audience than the book club discussions, and still other topics attracted new audiences.

Mentioned by all groups, including the young adult group, was the success of young adult programming at the Library. Young adults are given many opportunities to become aware of others in their community by participation and service projects.

One participant said: "Staff helps to welcome different people" (meaning people of all walks of life, nationalities, etc.)

4. Connect to the Online World: Public Internet access. Residents will have high speed access to the digital world with no unnecessary restrictions or fees to ensure that everyone can take advantage of the ever-growing resources and services available through the Internet.

The computer services are provided free of charge and appreciated by many of the attendees. More computers, time limits, and assistance from staff were mentioned. Keeping up with technology and keeping computers up-to-date were seen as challenges.

Users of the library realize that the time of the staff is limited, but also realize there is a need for more computer assistance and classes.

5. Create Young Readers: Early literacy. Children from birth to age five will have programs and services designed to ensure that they will enter school ready to learn to read, write, and listen.

The Children's staff mentioned the need for more computer access, and some patron behavior issues that impede on providing services to children. The Library does maintain a separate collection for children and hires a staff to serve their needs. Regular story hours and other programs for children were mentioned as ways this need is met.

6. Discover Your Roots: Genealogy and local history. Residents and visitors will have the resources they need to connect the past with the present through their family histories and to understand the history and traditions of the community.

One of the library users mentioned using the library for genealogy and getting related books through interlibrary loan. In another session, the library was described as a source for teaching children about local history. One library user mentioned that the library helped "preserve the history of the Town's affluent past".

7. Express Creativity: Create and share content. Residents will have the services and support they need to express themselves by creating original print, video, audio, or visual content in a real-world or online environment.

Although some of these services for creating video & audio may be provided through AOTV, the local access channel, young adults described the library as a place for creative activities both online and as real-world experiences.

Some Young Adult Activities Described as Enjoyable during the Focus Group Sessions

- Bake Sales
- Car Wash
- Read to small children
- Cooking Class
- Pennies for Peace
- Cleaned up the Park
- Community Service
- Anime Club
- Movie Night
- Wii Tournaments
- Prom Dresses

- YuGiOh Game

Young adults would enjoy even more ways to express and enjoy the library creatively, they offered these suggestions:

- Dance competitions
- Yoga
- Exercise to Videos
- Art classes
- Karaoke
- Musical (Workshops-Learning more about music)
- Lessons (musical, etc.)
- X-Box
- Zumba
- Field Trips (to the Mall; Whale Watch, Fishing, White Water Rafting, Camping, etc.)
- Just Dance (Wii)

8. Get Facts Fast: Ready reference. Residents will have someone to answer their questions on a wide array of topics of personal interest. *The Library was among the top answers by young adults answering the question: Where do they find information? Others mentioned library staff as an important resource. The library users group mentioned that staff would go to any lengths to find an answer.*

9. Know Your Community: Community resources and services. Residents will have a central source for information about the wide variety of programs, **services, and activities provided by community agencies and organizations.** *Library Users felt that the Library did a good job sharing community resources and library services through the following:*

- Website
- New books in the newspaper (Athol Daily News)
- Giant banners/signs
- For a small library they do pretty well
- Local television station

10. Learn to Read and Write: Adult, teen, and family literacy. Adults and teens will have the support they need to improve their literacy skills in order to meet their personal goals and fulfill their responsibilities as parents, citizens, and workers. *One focus group participant described the Athol Public Library as doing what they should do. In other words, the Library is providing contemporary and classic literature, computer facilities, and all types of media to support the Town's needs. Formal literacy classes were not mentioned as a need or current service.*

11. Make Career Choices: Job and career development. Adults and teens will have the skills and resources they need to identify career opportunities that suit their individual strengths and interests. *The helpfulness of staff and availability of ten computers to find information related to jobs and careers were cited as filling this need.*

12. Make Informed Decisions: Health, wealth, and other life choices. Residents will have the resources they need to identify and analyze risks, benefits, and alternatives before making decisions that affect their lives. *Again, the helpfulness of staff and availability of ten computers to find information related to jobs and careers were cited as filling this need. However a user expressed that it would be nice to get more books in the library, so interlibrary loan would not be so necessary, and that the library was in need of more historical and non-fiction books, including more medical books with new concepts, and a more balanced collection of political thought.*

13. Satisfy Curiosity: Lifelong learning. Residents will have the resources they need to explore topics of personal interest and continue to learn throughout their lives. *Both teens and library users expressed a joy of reading and the need to be around books. All groups were familiar with the availability of Interlibrary Loan and the willingness of the staff to get what they wanted fast!*

14. Stimulate Imagination: Reading, viewing, and listening for pleasure. Residents will have materials and programs that excite their imaginations and provide pleasurable reading, viewing, and listening experiences. *The abundance of programming and the staff's willingness to provide Interlibrary Loans seems to be evidence that library is offering opportunities for people to expand their interests.*

15. Succeed in School: Homework help. Students will have the resources they need to succeed in school. *Young adults mentioned the computer resources and staff help.*

16. Understand How to Find, Evaluate, and Use Information: Information fluency. Residents will know when they need information to resolve an issue or answer a question and will have the skills to search for, locate, evaluate, and effectively use information to meet their needs.

The staff was praised many times by all groups for their expertise, professionalism, and people skills to provide information. However, every group mentioned that the staff was always busy, understaffed, and unable to provide extended computer assistance. The elimination of the Assistant Director was seen as a great loss to service to the public and imposing greater responsibilities on the Director.

17. Visit a Comfortable Place: Physical and virtual spaces. Residents will have safe and welcoming physical places to meet and interact with others or to sit quietly and read and will have open and accessible virtual spaces that support networking.

Young adults enjoy the teen space because it is comfy, a place of their own, and includes books that they like to read. However, young adults offered suggestions for making the Teen Space even better:

- *Make Teen space bigger*
- *Build a new library with a movie theater; more new books; three floors, one exclusively for teens*
- *Make it more colorful (paint it bright!) Too much white*
- *Sound proof*

Adult users and town officials expressed that the library was a comfortable, welcoming, "gem of the community" that was "wonderfully old-fashioned". However, they also expressed that the library was cluttered, in need of space (mentioned emphatically in all groups), and that there was no "private space",

18. Welcome to the United States: New immigrants will have information on citizenship, English Language Learning (ELL), employment, public schooling, health and safety, available social services, and any other topics that they need to participate successfully in American life.

None of the groups mentioned this service response.

**FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES FROM THE FIVE FOCUS GROUPS:
YOUNG ADULTS, STAFF, TRUSTEES AND TOWN OFFICIALS, ONE LIBRARY USER GROUP AND ONE
COMBINED USER/NON USER GROUP**

All Responses from Young Adults

1. Where do you hang out?

Home
Here (Library)
*Friends' Houses
Skate Park
*School
Park (Lake)
Sanders Park
*Mall (Leominster, Holyoke, Hadley, Rochester, etc.)
Playground
High School
Movies
Hospital (parent employed)
Bus Stop

2. Where do you find the information you need for school work?

Internet
Library
Mom & Dad
Teachers
Make it up as I go along
Books
Video Game!
(Primarily English. Brain age.)
Google
Can't use Wikipedia – School doesn't allow
Suggested websites

3. What do you like about the library? What do you dislike about the library?

Like

Open Computer for 1 hour
Sign up & wait
Wi-fi
Laptops
Copy to a flash drive or extend time if you run out of time.
Teen space
 Comfy
 Space that is ours
 Books
 Activities
 Bake Sales
 Car Wash
 Read to small children
 Cooking Class
 Pennies for Peace
 Cleaned up the Park
 Community Service
 Anime Club
 Movie Night
 Wii Tournaments
 Prom Dresses
 YuGiOh Game
ATAC – Athol Teen Advisory Council
Books
Work off fines

Dislike

Only one person per computer
Hours (Closing time is too early)
Not open weekends
Only “fine free” day is Wednesday.
Adults have a bigger space
Need a bigger selection of movies (DVDs)
Want people to be accountable for scratched DVDs.
Need a scratch remover for CDs and DVDs (they know it is expensive)
Teen space is out in the open...in the back would allow teens to be a little louder
A private space
Don't like people that steal things: Alarm the books to prevent loss.

4. Why do you come to the library?

Friends
Books
Love reading
Printers
Copy Machines
Use the Internet
Summer Reading books
Place to get away from home
Summer reading prizes
Special event (monthly)
Wizard prize box
The Red Sox reading log and chance to win prizes

5. Are there any services/programs not now offered by the library which you think the library should provide?

Dance competitions
Yoga
Exercise to Videos
Art classes
Karaoke
Musical (Workshops-Learning more about music)
Lessons (musical, etc.)
X-Box
Zumba
Field Trips (to the Mall; Whale Watch, Fishing, White Water Rafting, Camping, etc.)
Just Dance (Wii)
Sound proof teen space

6. Do your friends use the library? If yes, for what purpose? If no, do you know why not?

Yes
Libraries are for nerds
Friends go to other libraries
Loses books
Transportation is a problem
Return Boxes around town
Friends work in the library

7. How do you find out about services and programs that the library offers?

ATAC
Mail
Emails
Come to the Library
Anne randomly stops me
Announce at school
Twitter (not used much)
Suggest a Facebook site

8. If you could design your ideal library, what would you do differently than what the current Athol Public Library does?

Teen space bigger
New library (movie theater; new books; 3 floors (one for teens)
Make it more colorful (paint it bright!) Too much white
Extend the hours
More computers
More laptops
Mobile lab
Computers on wheels
Computer class
Promote every service, so they know about laptops and other services
Bigger cooking area
Cooking classes
Separate rooms for different services
Daycare downstairs
People to help people & kids
Playroom
Assistance watching kids while adults select materials
Able to eat food
Snackbar

Better event room
Study hall/place to do your homework
Kiddie playground
Be able to use cell phones in the library without getting in trouble
ATAC would be able to buy CDs, DVDs, Books...unlimited credit card

All Responses from Staff

1. How could the Library improve?

More hours
Less clutter
More shelves
More space
More effective signage
Smaller group areas
Study areas
Quiet areas
Areas that permit noise
More space
Storage space
Joining C/W MARS
Work areas not accessible to the public
Staff bathrooms
Security-personal items need more secure location (public comes into "our" workspace)
Double wide stacks/handicapped accommodations
Handicapped accessibility (computers; less clutter, so handicapped can get around use services and browse)
Better climate control
Security for archives and the collection
Staff room separate from work space
More work space for pages, etc. to have
Large Main Desk area (2 desks & 2 small telephones, chairs to occasionally sit down.
Standing height workstations in the back
Better storage for the collection items (DVDs; CDs, etc.)
Circular public computer area
(Be easier for staff to monitor & help)
Parking lot
Better reading area for those who come in to read paper or other things
Designated food area
Fax machine for the public to use
Projector Room in addition to Activity Room
More space for everything!
With more space, still need expansion space.
More janitorial service
Steady consistent funding

2. In your view, and based on your experience, how have the expectations of the public changed over recent years?

More demanding
Want things yesterday
Free and Fast!
It's not just about books anymore
Social network capabilities
No fines
More computers
No restrictions on computer use
Respect is less than it once was; little respect for staff

Less comfortable waiting for ILL
Unwilling to bring materials back
Don't trust us to call; Don't pick up items on time
Expectation is that staff can do everything
Lot more expectation that the library staff is here to entertain rather than educate
Customers have become less respectful of each other
They use the library more
Less intimidated by staff
They know more about what the library can get
More aware of all that the library staff can do
Able to get things for free that once cost money
Know what's available, still expect staff to do it for them
Expect DVDs in better condition
Less people use the computer catalog than the card catalog (upstairs)
In children's room, people use the computer catalog more than the card catalog
1st or 2nd graders now use the catalog
Expect the newest and the latest (esp. DVDs)
Tend to believe the Internet over the Reference section
Disconnect between funding and services
Share how nice patrons & how grateful they can be
Change of hours didn't result in new patrons
Changing hours makes it hard for people to remember
Don't respect closing hours ("They think it's a suggestion")

3. In your view are you given enough training and support to deal with the customers?

Yes
More staff sharing time
Depends on who you are
People-person helps
Training not for dealing with customers (video???)
Staff Manual is given when staff start
Support from older people
Less training?
Regional training not available for younger members
Workshops at time evening workers could take advantage
Training area for online course
Sometimes bugs are not worked out for online users
No person is in charge of training
"Dorothy" was a detailed trainer, now inconsistent, trained by person leaving
On the plus side not a high rate of turnover
Longevity makes for good training
Time is spent on using the computer system, but not enough on dealing with patrons
You can't be prepared for everything!
Good pool to pick from when hiring & good student workers

4. What things do you feel would improve the delivery of library services to the public?

More space for activities/ programs
Better DVD system
More computer classes, but no one to teach
Better book sale area
Spend more time working with the patrons; telling people how to set up an account & place holds, renew, (Things that they could do on their own)
More hours
More space
Less clutter when you step in the door
More ways to display things in a more inviting way

More parking
Drive through
Banking booth
Get a RED Box (DVDs)
Space for an instructional sign
Inform people where to get a C/W MARS card
More dependable newspaper advertising
Make behavioral expectations clear, so that patrons respect each other (talk on cell phones; let babies cry while on computer; ignore kids while using computer)
Area is inconvenient for using computers, etc. for people with children
People expect personal assistance on the computer

5. What do you think we provide that we no longer need to?

VHS...Weed...Don't add
Handicapped can't handle the DVD (Reason for keeping VHS)
Audio Books on tape (cassettes)
Reference now circulating (minimized)
Mass. General Law
Typewriters

6. What do you see as the biggest challenges the library faces in the next 3-5 years?

Keeping up with technology
Space
Funding
Adequate staffing
Staying valuable to all the groups of people
Staying valuable vs. what people can look up at home
Keeping programs that appeal to a wide audience

7. As a staff member how would you like to be involved in shaping library services, programs and policies?

Already are involved
Director keeps up to date
Staff can add to policy change
Policy changes reflect staff input

All responses from Library Trustees and other Town Officials

1. When someone says Athol Public Library, what do you think of?

Community
Books
Cultural Center
Key component to a well balanced community
Versatility
Place for all kinds of things go on for all kinds of people
Deb Blanchard
Very devoted staff
Quality
Opportunities for the community
Too little space for the needs of the community
Good programs
Important for youth
Used by youth
Used by children
Comfortable place to come for all ages
Well used place: Lined up at the door before opening

Public access computers
Internet access
For visitors as well as residents
Accommodate difficult situations
Delivery to the elderly
Interlibrary loan
Safe community space
Summer Meal program (grant program)
Library open to whatever can help community, esp. children
Reach children & improve lives with food program
Open to all possibilities of service
Youth employment
Tax abatement for senior work program
Wonderful volunteer program
Limited budget
Renovation and addition in near future
Current website information

2. Aside from using the Library, where do you go for information?

Books
Internet
Newspapers
Periodicals
Websites
People
Library Staff
“The Source”
Agencies
Specialist (doctor, lawyer)
Police Department
Fire Department
Town Hall
David – Town Manager
Email
Ask the kids
Facebook
Cell phone
Schools
Internet but does not replace the importance of the public
library system

3. How could the Library improve?

Space...lots of space...
Larger staff
Open more hours
Assistant librarian
Saturday hours
Larger budget
More & newer books
Additional computers for the public
Larger space for teens
More space for other groups
More meeting rooms
Private areas
Offices for staff

Enroll partners to meet goals:

- Library partners
- Town departments
- Increase support base to promote goals
- YMCA/Library

Regionalize Libraries (explained that the opposite was happening, but it was suggested that libraries pair up like regional school systems)

- Expand handicapped accessibility
- Expand flexible and different types of programs
- Education (computer classes) programs restored
- Business partnerships
- Grants and Foundation support
- School Systems and Library Cooperation

**4. What do you see as the biggest challenges the library faces in the next 3-5 years?
And, how can the Library overcome these challenges?**

Funding is the biggest challenge.

Ideas to get more money:

- More Grant applications
- Lobby for change of committee members or attitudes that serve on the Finance Committee
- Begging in the streets
- Volunteer services (limited by staff supervisors and abilities of volunteers)
- State Funding (Changes in laws that would make regionalization easier & change the exact percentage requirement)
- Seek Federal Funding
- Fundraising events
- “Let’s make a deal” with Dunkin’ Donuts (partner)(change men’s room into the donut shop)
- Friends of the Library
- Win the lottery

Funding the Expansion is the second major challenge

Ideas for funding the expansion:

- Town support
- USDA grant
- Green Communities Grant
- State Library Construction Funding (MBLC)
- Private donors
- Capital Campaign (competing with a “zillion others”/ non-competing)
- Threaten closing (vs. working cooperatively)
- Gambling opportunity
- Bingo Night once a week
- Spaghetti Suppers
- Dinner every night of the week (support different departments)
- Selling men (auction their services)
- Goods & Services Auctions (different angle from the AOTV)

Keeping Certification was seen as the third biggest challenge

- Encourage State to loosen rules
- Explain to local officials how the rules help to strengthen the library
- Overall money increase
- In the absence of the present Central Regional Library System more burden will now be on the town budget
- Work with the state legislators
- Perhaps supply an extra courier system
- Pool money from area libraries to pay for workshops
- Find advocates for libraries & ask them to step forward

Serving non-certified library users from other communities within the library also is a perceived challenge
Encourage community to assist with services in Athol
Send Carol to all of the Town Meetings to advocate for library support of Athol PL
Finding a way to open longer hours & weekends is a challenge
Assistant Director position; then open weekends (Trustee Priority)
Business Partnership to fund every other Saturdays
Finding resources to fund Assistant Director position is a challenge
Private funding?? & explore state and legal ramifications
Ask the town manager to put in budget
Encourage an altruistic community volunteer with an MLS and a computer degree to volunteer

Other Challenges:

Changing needs of citizens (ever-changing needs of community requires library to change to meet their needs)
Providing enough DVDs; Computers; Electronic Books)
Additional staff
Trained staff (tech training)

5. Thinking of the variety of town services offered to Athol residents, what value or role does the Library have?

Information Resource
Education
Dissemination
Resource
Community Center
Training Facility
Computer & Internet access for the community
Safe gathering place
Job finding assistance
Value to youth (teens)
Programming for teens
Young for the school research needed to fulfill the educational needs for their future
Elderly to allow them the facility to keep their minds sharp
Directions & public information
Notary Service
More accessible than Town Hall
Fax Services
Consistently open
Friendly place in Town
Extraordinary staff

6. How important is it to have the library in the town center?

Extremely
Library is the center of the town
Convenient
On the bus line
Across the street to the YMCA
Destination location along with other places in downtown area
Convenient to group
Green Community
Location in center of town is important for LEED certification
Ten businesses within a ½ mile is suggested by LEEDS
Keeps the Downtown area vibrant

7. How much community support is there for the Library?

There is more support when there is matching support from other sources than town money.
Long sigh! (People can only afford “so much”)

A lot of support
Moral support although not financial
Not sure that the town would not support if faced with decertification; closing, etc.
There are non-users in the town and on the finance committee
Beginning to wane due to competition from electronic media

All Responses from Users

1. When someone says Athol Public Library, what do you think of?

A gem in our community
Excellent resource
Small
Doesn't have a large collection
Good choice of books
Affiliated with other libraries
Interlibrary Loan
Pleasant atmosphere
Peaceful
Everyone is very helpful
Wonderful staff
They really do what a library should do
Go out of their way
Never had difficulty with personnel
Courteous staff
Extremely helpful
Feeling of the "fifties" – wonderfully old-fashioned
Hometown
Not "in your face"
Not blaring music/technology overload
Old fashioned in the way that the world used to be
Comfortable atmosphere
Community Center
Resource Center
Place to get books
Welcoming & Joining opportunity
Information
Vibrant
Useful
Multi-generational
Needed
Service to the community
Friendly service
Interesting Programs
Comfortable place to ask a question
Internet connection
Find material
Fast service
Tax service
Offered to everyone
Staff will get back to you with an answer to question
Interlibrary Loan
If it's not here they get it & fast!
Order if they can't ILL
Learning opportunities
Variety of programming
Different groups & opportunities (Prom Gowns)

New technologies
Facilities for meetings
Lots of teen activities
Children's activities (storytimes & casual play group)
Summer Reading
Winter Reading
Reading Buddies
Community Reading Day (School & Library Cooperation)
On the Same Page- Early nineteen hundreds discussion/Mass author
Most valuable service in town
Most valuable building in town

2. Aside from using the Library, where do you find the information you need?

Google
Dictionary
Internet
Look through old book stores
Antiquarian book stores for local history
NPR
Newspaper
Radio
News Magazines
Television
Speakers that speak to certain issues
Professionals (accountants, physicians, etc.)
Locker Room at the Y
Friends
Church
People

3. Do you see the library as having a role in strengthening the sense of community in Athol?

Absolutely, positively (Note that this was the first response of both library users groups!)
Brings people together in groups that might not necessarily group on their own
Neutral location
Inviting location
People can meet people that are different
Staff helps to welcome different people (people of all walks of life, nationalities, etc.)
Social aspect
There for a resource on Town projects (municipality & groups)
Try to improve town
Local staffing helps the sense of community...Staff are part of the community
Competent staff
Welcoming/Opening their door to Y groups and others
Collaboration/Networking with other town groups
Young people do not value books; they value what comes from handheld devices
Offers alternative to technology...towards reading
Elderly gather to read materials that they can't afford and then go to gathering places (lunch, etc.)
Coupons
Talks in the library-chance to get together
School children learn local history
Tax lady for elderly
Anne Teen Program welcomes this group of upcoming generation and involving them (ATAC)

4. How important is it to have the library in the town center?

Extremely
Crucial

Within walking distance of elderly housing
Sufficient parking in the center of town
Part of the fabric of community where we show "it" with pride
Center of town brings people in... with other destination locations
Saves gas to make one trip to go to the library and do another errand downtown
Makes it readily accessible to people
Holds the community together in a physical sense
Adds vibrancy to the Town with the Library in the Center
People see it as they drive through
Place where people come to spend hours to read and to socialize "downtown"
Keeps businesses in the center of town
One of many destination places in the center of town
We love our old building

5. What are the top reasons you come to the library?

Like to read books
Love to read
Atmosphere
Nice collection of atlases; topographic maps
Book groups
Magazines
Books
Videos
Talk to the Staff
To be a part of the Town
Classes/Speakers
Bring grandkids to play
Get things to keep the grandkids entertained
Museum passes
Christmas open house
Because the staff is always trying to do things & get things to bring in more people and for the community enjoyment
Hear authors when they visit

6. Are there any services/programs not now offered by the library which you think the library should provide?

Open Saturday mornings
All day Saturday would be nice
Disappointing that it is not open on Saturday
More hours
Saturday hours
Computer classes (Excel & Other software)
Computer Classes on the beginner level/specific need
Training for different levels of computer skills
Offer classes on diverse group of beginners
Major entertainment for the elderly without cars
Finding ways to add more staff
Add Poetry Group/Yoga to things the library does

7. Do you feel the Library promotes/markets/publicizes its services effectively?

Yes, uses the following methods:
Website
New books in the newspaper (Athol Daily News)
Giant banners/signs
Local television station
Newspaper coverage in small town is shared by different groups

Flyers & publicity
Advertising on the Internet
Newsletters go to the Friends
On Twitter & other social networking, Facebook
For a small library they do pretty well
Write-ups after the programs
Photos
Work with the schools / promote reading for schools
Increase use of the library in recent years due to the economy could be publicized to promote the value of the library

8. If you could design your ideal library, what would you do differently than what the current Athol Public Library does?

Comfortable seating
More shelf space for books
More and sturdier stepstools
Less clutter in the history corner
Would hate to see a modern building with contemporary furniture
Want the library to reflect childhood memories of the 1950s (this is a time when parents read to children and that is what would be nice to encourage)
Needs more shelf space
Like to get more books in the library vs. Interlibrary Loaning
More historical, non-fiction
More medical books with new concepts
Balanced collection of political thought
More computers
Library should be for serving the community, including student needs
Stay open later than 5:30 (especially for workers and those who commute out of town)
More volunteers to keep the library open
More parking spaces
Need more open facility hours
More modern facility
An addition
Technically up-to-date
Better financed
Bigger
Adequate staff
Adequate hours
Lot more storage space
Community space – So that there are no conflicts with Activity Room
This old building updated
Opening up spaces
Ability to stay open with more hours
Dedicated funds that cannot be handled by other departments/or the town
Plans for a new addition
An up and out addition
Green expansion
Create a political environment that is pro-library
Zip up the apathy
Or a new library but central
Bit of nostalgia about old bookcase
Fireplace
A new site would solve problems of lack of land and parking & other constraints
Preserve the sense of history of the Town's affluent past
Reuse what is already here
A room for teens to congregate

A place to socialize
Living Room atmosphere
MORE ROOM!!!
A room just with a TV for programs
Computer use room
Librarians' office space would be 40 times bigger
More storage

APPENDIX C:

Athol Public Library Technology Plan 2011-2016

Because the Athol Public Library's information and access services rely on a secure and well maintained information system, the library will provide access services through its Integrated Library System (ILS) and will maintain a hardware network with adequate Internet connectivity, computer equipment, and program access to meet the research, educational, and recreational needs of our patrons.

Background

The Athol Public Library serves a town with a population of 11,299 people. Our library is one of the larger libraries in the immediate vicinity. As a result, we also serve people from many of the surrounding towns. Our patron database exceeds 12,000 patrons. We have an active children's area with three computers, granted by the Gates Foundation, with Internet access, a mobile computer lab which we use to teach classes in our meeting areas, a newly renovated young adult area, a public access computer area with eight studio hybrid computers (again purchased by the Gates Foundation) that are all equipped with Microsoft Office, a selection of games, Internet access utilities, along with Steady State to limit patrons' access to our network, CleanSlate to restrict patrons' ability to make changes on individual computers and prevent storing data on the library computers, and Symantec Endpoint Protection as an anti-virus software. The public access computers are equipped with DVD/CDRW drives and front access USB ports; all of which are heavily used by patrons. Our patrons rely on thumb drives or CDs to store their data. Since we have a few that still use floppy drives, we have a portable USB drive that can be attached to any computer. These computers are able to print to a networked laser printer, either in the adult circulation area or in the children circulation area.

In the adult section, we have three specially equipped public access computers for visually impaired patrons, and an IP video-phone. These adaptive technologies computers have all the software that is on the other public access computers with the addition of the JAWS and Zoom Text programs.

We also provide 24/7 commercial WIFI Internet access for patrons with wireless devices such as laptops. For security reasons, this access is separate from the library's network. In order to provide printing capability for the laptop users, we have a free standing printer station with a USB connection and installation disc available.

In the children's section there are three new computers, purchased with Gates Foundation money that have the typical Office products as well as games such as the Magic Schoolbus and Logical Journey of the Zoombinis, a favorite among the users.

There are five other public computers. We have two computers that serve as the patron OPAC's in the adult area and a third patron OPAC in the children area. To control patron usage of the public access computers, we use PC Reservation. Since the public access computers are often all in use, we provide a self-service kiosk so patrons can establish reservations. The fifth computer is attached to a microform reader so patrons can view, print, save, and email images from the library's microfilm and microfiche collection.

The staff computers are distributed throughout the building. There are computers in the Director's Office, the Assistant Director's Office, 2 Adult Circulation stations, a Reference station, the PC Reservation management console, a staff workstation, the Inter-library Loan work station, the Adult Cataloging workstation, the Children's librarian's office, the Children Circulation workstation, the Children Cataloging workstation, and the Archive workstation. All of these computers are equipped with Microsoft Office for productivity, Follett Destiny, Internet access, Symantec anti-virus, and any additional

software required for individual tasks. The library participates in a site volume licensing subscription service through Dell-ASAP to provide economical software licenses.

The library suffers from significant building limitations. The building was built in 1916 with an addition and renovation in 1960, but the design does not accommodate the current technological needs well. Any attempt to expand computer resources or workstations will depend upon remodeling and expanding existing spaces. We are in the initial stages of planning for such an expansion. Until that time, it is not feasible to attempt to add computer workstations.

The existing server room is a converted janitor closet with a large sink and a window air conditioner. The server itself is a Gates Foundation Gateway content server that is meeting the current needs, but it has reached its functional limits. It is at its memory capacity with 2 GB RAM installed. It has a RAID architecture, but the hard drive is almost full. The automatic backup system has not worked properly so the staff must run daily backups manually. A proposal for a new server has been received by Guardian Information Technologies to replace the server with a Windows 2008 operating system.

Technology Planning

The technology planning team includes the library's Library Director, Assistant Director, the Computer Aide, staff members representing adult services and children services, a representative of the library's Friends group, and a representative from the community at large. Technical assistance is provided by Guardian Information Technologies in Leominster.

The technology planning team reviews the existing goals and evaluates the status of the library *vis a vis* these goals. Goals that have been completed or have become obsolete will be removed and new goals will be established. Once the goals have been revised, the team will develop specific goals and an action plan to accomplish those goals. Because of budgeting cycles, the technology planning process will involve meetings during the first and last quarters of each fiscal year.

Because the technology planning involves existing hardware infrastructure and projecting the implementation of developing technologies, the team will use this plan and the library's Hardware Technology Plan as working documents. Both will be evaluated and revised annually with major revisions on a 5-Year cycle.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1

To maintain an ILS that will provide staff and patrons with efficient access to the library's collection, provide circulation services, and provide a means to track collection and usage statistics.

Objectives

1. Maintain at least the present level of service for patrons accessing the library's collection by updating the library's ILS.
2. Enhance the library's resources for resource sharing through interlibrary loan by pursuing circulating membership in a library network.
3. Provide staff with any training required because of ILS changes.

Conduct a comprehensive analysis to identify the best ILS option for our library. Based on the ILS comparison, the most comprehensive and cost effective option for upgrading our ILS is to join MassCat, but the library should weigh the potential loss of subscription databases and reduced efficiency for the ILL process. The library should budget for an ILS migration in fiscal year 2011-2012. Depending on the selected system, the library might need to upgrade hardware or telecommunications access in conjunction with the migration. Migration to C/W MARS Millennium will require an upgrade of our WAN connection with the C/W MARS system. Our existing hardware and Internet connection meet the requirements of the MassCat Koha Zoom system. Continued attention should be paid to a proposed C/W MARS change to Evergreen from Triple I as it may be a more affordable solution.

The migration will require staff training which can be obtained through C/W MARS, CMRLS, or MassCat staff. This training should occur in at least two sessions with the first serving as an introduction and the second after initial implementation so that staff can ask specific questions particular to our location. By the time we complete an ILS migration, both C/W MARS and MassCat should be fully integrated with the Union Catalog which should facilitate shared access to support ILL services.

Goal 2

To provide computer resources to meet the reference, research, personal enrichment, and recreational needs of the library's staff, patrons, and community.

Objectives

1. Invite CMRLS to provide in-house training on available reference resources and online databases.
2. Maintain the research databases available to patrons through membership in CMRLS and C/W MARS.
3. Investigate the potential for providing federated searches and OPAC access through our library's home page. Implement these tools if feasible.

The library provides access to subscription databases that are included in our membership in CMRLS and online affiliate membership in C/W MARS. Our library's statistics indicate that our patrons rarely utilize this resource. A training was held in 2010 with a member of CMRLS (now defunct) which was very helpful for the staff. The next step is training the new staff members who have come on board since the last training and a refresher for current staff. By December 2010, the library will host training by MLS staff on using the online databases.

By January 2010, we will produce a bookmark and flyer to introduce and promote our databases. These will be available in the library and at the local schools. During this fiscal year, we will closely track database use to determine actual demand. MassCat does not provide access to research databases so the migration to MassCat would result in the loss of some research databases (Nora Blake, Personal Communication, March 31, 2008). Using the information from the actual use, the library will investigate supplementing the MLS databases with additional subscription databases and OpenAccess resources. The library should weigh this cost along with the cost of migration to ascertain that actual cost of the full ILS package. Special attention will be paid to the current proposal to move to Evergreen by C/W MARS.

Goal 3

To provide computer and Internet access for staff and patrons to efficiently complete research, work related activities, and academic work.

Objectives

1. Continually monitor the public access workstations to make sure they have the more current technologies.
2. Replace staff workstations that are more than 3 years old with systems that will continue to meet staff needs.
3. Replace OPAC, PC Reservation self-service, and adaptive technologies workstations before they experience system failures.
4. All new hardware should be able to run the most current operating system.

The library maintains two Internet access subscriptions. The primary subscription provides Internet access for the library's network through a cable modem connection with static IP addresses. This system is robust enough to meet our current and projected Internet access needs. The secondary Internet connection is a DSL connection that provides wireless access for laptop users. To protect our network's integrity, we maintain this as a completely separate system. These systems are meeting the library's present and anticipated needs so no change is required.

The public access computers have just been replaced by studio hybrids from Dell that were purchased by the Gates Foundation. Care should be taken to keep them up to date and budgeting for eventual replacement should be planned.

We have six staff computers that should be replaced when they are 3-5 years old. The public access computers run Windows Vista Professional; we should migrate to this operating system or Windows 7 throughout the library. We should upgrade to the current version of Microsoft Office or equivalent software. This should be completed during fiscal year 2010-2011.

Successful completion of this goal is guaranteed provided the library commits adequate funding to follow the replacement and upgrade schedule. The result of completing this goal will be our continued ability to meet the staff and patron hardware requirements. Using PC Reservation, we will be able to track any changes in PAC use which will reflect our ability to meet patron needs and expectations.

Goal 4

To provide patrons with access to assistive technologies for communication, research, and recreation.

Objectives

1. Maintain updates of adaptive technologies at these workstations.
2. Provide staff with detailed written instructions in the use of assistive technologies.
3. Publicize the availability of these resources to encourage use.

The adaptive technologies computer should be replaced during fiscal year 2012-2013. Our staff has had training in use of the assistive technologies software.

The video-phone system has adequate instructional materials. We will provide annual training updates so staff remain comfortable with these tools.

Neither of these tools enjoys much use. To promote their use, the library will provide an article with photos for the local newspaper. This should be completed during December 2010 and every 6 months thereafter.

This represents an underused resource in our library. By using publicity and staff training, we should demonstrate that there is a need for these services among our patrons. We have entered these systems in our circulation software so that we can track use and patron demand for these resources.

Goal 5

To provide adequate space and technology (i.e. electrical hookups, wi-fi) so that library users can easily link up to a high speed Internet connection.

1. Maintain the current commercial wireless wi-fi system and upgrade as needed.
2. Create an area or stations where users can easily access the Internet with their laptops and have electrical outlets for recharging.
3. Allow enough space so that users have enough area to work with their documents.
4. Create quiet study areas that are connected so that home business owners or students can work collaboratively in groups.

Follow-Up

This plan and the Hardware Plan are to be reviewed and updated annually. Each year the technology planning team will evaluate the library's success in completing the planned projects and make any necessary revisions and recommendations. These plans should be thoroughly revised and updated every three years.

Written and compiled by Jude Anderson, former Assistant Director and Debra Blanchard, Library Director 31 July 2010. Accepted by the Board of Library Trustees 25 August 2010.