



LONG RANGE PLAN

Lincoln Library

November 2011



The Lincoln Library
222 West River Road
Lincoln, Vermont 05443

BACKGROUND

Established in 1889 by the Ladies Aid of the Lincoln Baptist Church, the Lincoln Library has served residents of Lincoln as well as those of surrounding towns for the past 122 years, this despite a total loss to fire in 1924 and catastrophic flooding of New Haven River in 1938 and 1998. As Lincoln's population grew to today's total of about the 1,300 so too has the library's collection of books from 500 in 1890 to over 16,000 today. The library has also become a center of community activity which provides programs for all ages ranging from story time for toddlers to physical fitness for seniors, a meeting place for individuals, small groups, and town organizations, as well as access to electronic services like e-books, email, social networking, research, and general Internet access.

As the library's role in the community has evolved, so too has the building. Thanks to the generosity, hard work, and leadership of town residents, the library moved from the basement of Burnham Hall in the New Haven flood plain to its present location on West River Road. The current structure combines form and function, the first to match the town's architectural aesthetic, and second to meet the intellectual, social, and creative needs of its population.

The wise planning and hard work of staff, trustees, donors, and volunteers have enabled the library to serve Lincoln extremely well for the 12 years since the flood of 1998 required a new start. It is now time to write the next chapter in the Long Range Plan. To prepare such a document, the trustees solicited community input, in five primary ways:

1. Questionnaires filled out by residents, both printed and online
2. Interviews with leaders of town organizations
3. Conversations with past donors, volunteers, staff, and trustees
4. Meetings with teens and young adults
5. Meetings with focus groups in the fall and winter of 2010

The trustees will continue to reconsider and amend this current document until it is time to craft an entirely new plan.



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MISSION STATEMENT

As a community hub, the Lincoln Library seeks to encourage life-long learning and positive interaction among town residents as well as their engagement with the world at large. To those ends the library's primary goals are: a) to provide information, (b) to promote communication, and (c) to assure friendly, free access to the resources necessary for both.¹

CURRENT STATE OF THE LIBRARY

Programs

The Lincoln Library has a wide array of programs that appeal to all age groups, from toddlers to elders. There are two age-appropriate children's groups, a senior program, book group, writer's group, several exercise classes, and various evening programs that cover everything from world travel and politics to black bear behavior. The library also has classes on subjects such as computer literacy and quilting. The librarian is constantly looking for interesting speakers and activities. The library has two long-running program series - Wildlife and Armchair Traveler. Any town body that wishes to use the facility for meetings is welcome. For instance, the Lincoln Conservation Commission and the Five-Town Health Alliance regularly meet in the conference room.

In addition, the library has annual events for the entire community such as a book-and-plant sale in the spring and a pie sale in the fall. Recent collaboration with Lincoln Sports has provided fun for the whole community through events such as a parade and a scavenger hunt. We hope to continue this partnership.

Finances

The library, through the generosity of many individuals and families, got its endowment off to a strong start when the new building was first constructed. This endowment was doing very well until 2008, when the national economic downturn brought about a drop in its value. Still, interest on the endowment provides about one fifth of the yearly operating expenses. Town tax support started out at \$5,000/year but has risen on two occasions, and now stands at

¹ *Information resources include: books, electronic media, the Internet, and the many educational, cultural, social, and recreational programs sponsored for all ages. Communication resources include: the library's meeting rooms, access to email and social networking, community events, software for writing, publishing, and web design.*



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\$36,500, or about 3/5 of the operating budget. The annual appeal and special events organized by the Board of Trustees provide the remainder.

Nevertheless, since 2008, it has been difficult to make ends meet. The Board of Trustees, and especially the librarian, have worked hard to keep costs down. The operating budget has only risen by an average of 2% per year in the last 5 years and remained flat in the last two.

Physical plant

The library building is now 11 years old. While it is still in generally good condition, it has needed painting, some boiler and heating pipe work, and various small repairs. The carpet has been cleaned once a year and appears in good condition. The linoleum floors are holding up as well. The furniture and stacks are mostly in good repair. At some point, though, there will be a need for major repairs, such as roof replacement.

The grounds and a nice array of shrubs, trees, and beds have benefited from the loving attention of many volunteers. "Susan's Garden", built in memory of avid volunteer Susan Oliveau, provides a quiet bench surrounded by lovely flowering perennials. The ditch behind the library was partially cleared out in 2010, particularly around the culvert that goes under the walk over to Quaker Street. Sometime in the future it would be good to replace this culvert with a small bridge. The culvert has heaved; the water would flow more freely under a bridge. The driveway has had a chronic problem with water pooling near the pottery shop parking lot and causing potholes – it is the low point of the area. Filling and ditching in the summer of 2011 have hopefully solved this issue.

Technology

The librarian constantly strives to keep up with the fast-changing world of technology. The library now offers downloadable books in a number of formats.

While the library has purchased some networking hardware and pays a small stipend to a volunteer helper, most of the technology in the library is donated, as is the effort to maintain and update it. The library needs new computers, updated software, and a more streamlined and more easily maintained network. This is especially important as patrons seek more digital services and as library administration is increasingly digitized. Reliable, current hardware and software would also better support the technology classes the library offers.



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Overall Assessment

The "new" library in Lincoln has been an unqualified success. With over 16,000 volumes, computers, a generous array of programs, and a beautiful physical space, the library has become one of the hubs of the community. Many people feel passionately about the role that the library plays in the town. As the years have passed, ever greater numbers of people and organizations have used the building for meetings and events. The librarian is to be especially commended for developing the breadth of programs that appeal to all age groups, and her enthusiastic pursuit of the latest computer technology.

These accomplishments are remarkable, but so are the challenges, especially financial. This report seeks to guide us in building on the library's success while assuring its financial health.

THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Overall the current slate of programs and services is excellent. Little needs to change. Four areas for exploration are:

1. Outreach to underserved populations.

The library has experimented with services to residents who don't normally use the library. These have included talks on wildlife and conservation, community events like pie sales, galas, open houses, and family activities. The board and staff will continue to look for opportunities to encourage use of the library.

2. Teens

The library has an excellent array of children's programs. Those for pre-school and elementary students have been particularly successful. However, the older students at Mount Abraham often remain longer in Bristol, whether for after school activities or for social reasons. The library should:

- a. Make knowledgeable volunteers available for help in English, math, and perhaps other subjects. Such volunteers could also include students. Develop a mechanism for pairing students with tutors.
- b. Provide a recreation field for town use in front of the library. (See "Recreation" under "Physical Plant")



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- c. Reinstitute the program to support families doing home schooling.
- d. Sponsor activities like chess, writing workshops, filmmaking, etc. These could evolve into interest groups who meet regularly.

3. Technology

While most patrons have computers at home, the library nonetheless has an obligation to provide reliable computers for the following reasons:

- a. To serve those who do not have their own machines or whose connection to the Internet is slow or unreliable.
- b. To allow librarians to help patrons learn to navigate the vast amounts of information available electronically.
- c. To provide classes in information technology.

Reliable administrative computers are an essential resource for staff and the management of the library. To that end, the library should:

- a. Replace all current computers, both administrative and patron, with Macintosh desktops-- two machines per year between from 2012-2016.
- b. Implement a planned renewal program beginning in 2012 so that these new machines and their software can begin to be replaced at two per year beginning in 2016. (This constitutes a 4-year renewal cycle.)
- c. Invest in regular, annual training for staff so they can keep abreast of the technologies they need for management of library resources, for providing aid to patrons, and very basic troubleshooting.
- d. Purchase in 2012 a printer/copier/scanner/fax machine and implement a planned renewal on a 5-year cycle.
- e. By 2013, hire a professional to conduct a "backroom" renovation of all networking gear – cabling, routers, and wireless access points. Implement a renewal program on a cycle s/he recommends.
- f. Provide an annual series of workshops for patrons ranging from productivity software (ex., Microsoft Office) to effective internet search to hobbies like photography, video, and music.



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4. Services

Since the library budget and staffing are finite, the trustees, collaborating with the librarian, must decide which, if any, current programs or operations can be curtailed or eliminated as new programs are implemented. Programs that should probably continue or grow include the following:

- a. Book acquisitions, including books on CD and downloadable audio / e-books.
- b. Interlibrary loan programs.
- c. Story Time for Preschool Children.
- d. Cultural Programs and Events
Examples: Armchair Traveler, speakers, displays.
- e. Provision of space for community groups and special presentations.
- f. Community events, such as annual book and pie sales, etc.
- g. Senior programs.

ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE

While programs and services are strong, frequently both staff and trustees are overstretched in providing them. The following actions are suggested:

1. Staff:

- a. By June 2012, reduce the workload of the librarian, whether through cuts in hours, program, services, special events, administrative overhead, or some combination of all four.
Example: Staff some programs with volunteers. Summer reading and teen afternoon program are prime candidates for help.
- b. Provide staff with more reliable computers, and a multifunction printer. (See "Technology")



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- c. Provide staff with the appropriate training, including conferences and workshops, and the time to attend. This will require budgeted funding.
- d. Review and update the job description for the librarian and her assistants.
- e. Insure a competitive wage for the librarian with annual raises.
- f. Organize an annual community event to express appreciation for the librarian and the library.

2. Governance / Trustees:

The current model of governance appears unsustainable. The trustees perform an enormous amount of hands-on work, from building maintenance to fund-raising to fiduciary responsibilities, yet the board can rely on only a handful of members for much of the heavy lifting. The trustees should either cut the number of tasks or increase the number of people available to do them. Much will depend on efforts to secure reliable, long-term financing that will reduce the need for constant fund raising and also provide for the purchase of goods and services currently furnished by trustees.

While town residents have been very supportive of the library through donations of money and labor, total contributions have declined even as usage has risen.

The trustees should:

- a. Concurrently with the Capital Campaign cited under "Finance and Budget", mount one last membership drive for "Friends of the Library". This will require personal calls from current trustees and the recruitment of friends to call friends. Becoming a friend might be particularly attractive to patrons who are unable to contribute financially.
- b. Continue the current subcommittee model and expand membership to include more volunteers. Best would be groups that could operate independently with a volunteer chair who would report to a designated trustee liaison.
- c. Encourage enthusiasm, appreciation, and "ownership" of the library with regular publicity about library programs, services, special events, and successes. Articles in local newspapers should be the



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main vehicle.

Task one or two trustees or volunteers with this responsibility.

- d. When choosing board-appointed trustees, select those with enough time to do what is required beyond attendance at board meetings.
- e. Pay for services that trustees currently do themselves.
(Currently the library does not have the resources to do so. See "Finance and Budget" below.)
- f. Secure dependable, ongoing financing that will make fund-raising less frequent. This will also allow community events to emphasize their role as a gathering for all rather than only for those who wish to make a donation.
(See "Finance and Budget" below.)

PHYSICAL PLANT

The building and grounds are currently in very good shape thanks to the efforts of the librarian, trustees and volunteers. However as the building continues to age it will require continued maintenance and repair, some significant.

1. Building:

Determine maintenance and renewal cycles for the various systems and set aside annual capital in amount necessary to cover costs. This is especially important for large expenses like boilers, roof, and painting.

2. Grounds:

- a. Work with the town to determine the best use of the land in front of the library, for example a ball field or town green. Such a space would draw people to the library and enhance its value as a community hub. This project has been on the library's agenda for a long time. The trustees should encourage community citizens to take on this project, alleviating the need for the trustees to accomplish yet another task.
(See "Finance and Budget.")
- b. Continue yearly spring cleanup with volunteers, which gets the plantings on the grounds off to a good start each spring.
- c. Do a yearly walk-around with a knowledgeable person to see what needs to be done to the outside of the building and the grounds.



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- d. Look for a source of funding to replace the large culvert with a bridge across the drainage ditch and to provide funds to clean the ditch.

FINANCE AND BUDGET

As outlined in the "Current State of the Library", financial resources barely cover current programs and services and will not allow for the complete implementation of this plan. The board's primary task over the next five years is to increase both the amount and the reliability of funding.

1. Capital Campaign

To increase the library's endowment by approximately \$400,000. This Long Range Plan will be an important document to underpin this effort.

2. Town Support

To Increase the town's investment sufficiently to provide all funding not covered by revenues from the endowment². This will involve asking residents to assess the value of the library and what they are willing to pay for it.

a. Community Outreach

- Articles in local newspapers about the campaign and its progress as well as about library programs, services, and special events.
- Mobilize "friends" to call neighbors and acquaintances.
- Community events like open houses, scavenger hunts, Frisbee contests, and volleyball.
- Mailings about library activities
- Meetings and focus groups

b. Town Meeting³

Prepare a brief but compelling presentation that demonstrates:

² *These revenues will consist of the interest from the endowment, which has been increased by the capital campaign.*

³ *Requests for further town investment will be most effective after the capital campaign is completed.*



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- The value of the services, programs, and special events provided by the library.
- Figures on library use.
- Results of fund raising efforts to date.
- Also, be prepared to answer questions about how the library spends its money.

CONCLUSION

The following four areas are most in need attention. They are listed in priority order:

1. Finance

To fully support its current strengths as well as its future needs, the library must develop long-term, dependable sources of funding to add to those it already has.

2. Governance

Trustees should spend less time doing maintenance and fund-raising; they should focus on oversight of programs, services and policies, planning, outreach to the public, organizing volunteers, and supporting the librarian and her staff.

3. Administration

- a. The librarian needs a reduction in workload and a more competitive wage
- b. Staff should have greater access to training, conferences, and other learning opportunities.
- c. Administrative overhead and workflow should be assessed and efficiencies explored. Information technology may prove useful for this task.

4. Technology

In concert with staff and patrons, the trustees should decide how much to invest in technology, both for administrative functions and for patron use. Whatever technology services the library provides should be reliable and updated on a regular basis.



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The Lincoln Library offers outstanding, highly successful programs and services that are much valued by the community. The building is still in very good shape 11 years after its completion and the number of patron visits remains consistently high. The Board of Trustees and the librarian wish to maintain the existing programs and services and at the same time plan for the future, particularly the financial future, of this community jewel.