

Doorway to the Past, Present and Future

**The Morristown & Morris Township Library:
The Past, Present and Future:
The Next Chapter**

A Strategic Plan for our Library

2013-2018



December 2013

Doorway to the Past, Present and Future

Dear Morristown & Morris Township residents,

The Trustees of the Joint Free Public Library of Morristown & Morris Township have adopted and are pleased to present to you our Strategic Plan 2013-2018. The plan is the result of many hours of thought and discussion between the advisory Strategic Plan Committee, the Library Board of Trustees, staff, the Library Friends and Library Foundation and of course, you, the members of our communities. We have torn the plan apart several times and put it back together again, striving for the best possible library. Library Development Solutions served as our consultant. We wish to thank all who took the time to serve on a committee, participate in a focus group or town meeting or by completing a survey form. We do appreciate all your time, comments and suggestions.

As the keystone of our two communities the Library continually strives for improvement. We look for new ways to deliver excellent Library service whether it is answering a reference question, or providing programs for a variety of ages. We want to offer fun, innovative and informative programs that reflect your needs and interests, while being good and proud stewards of our beautiful building and grounds.

The 1917 wing has been a particular focus over the past few years. Using a combination of insurance funds, bequests, donations and reserves we have updated the heating system, added a fire-safety gas-detection system and building-wide fire sprinkler system, relocated where both the electric and gas service enter the building, improved the lighting, replaced carpeting, shelving and repainted the interior with historic paint colors as close to the original as possible. Using grants from both the Garden State Historic Preservation Trust and the Morris County Historic Preservation Trust we worked on the exterior pointing and clock tower area. This year we will replace our 96-year-old sewer connection. In 2014 we will begin necessary repairs to the 1987 exterior walls.

As we move forward we will explore ways to provide more services both physically and virtually. We will look for ways to conserve both energy and reduce building costs while maintaining a beautiful, functional modern library. We will explore alternative funding sources.

We would not be the wonderful library we are without our many dedicated volunteers, including the Board of Trustees, the Library Friends and the Library Foundation, Library Staff and many other generous volunteers, donors and Library users. We want to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you for enriching our Library. We encourage you to read our plan, use us often, either in person or virtually, participate in our programs and continue to keep us central in your lives.

Maria S. Norton

Library Director

Nancy Bangiola

President, Board of Trustees

Doorway to the Past, Present and Future

Doorway to the Present, Past and Future: The Next Chapter	4
Understanding Our Community	4
Our Vision for the Future	5
Mission Statement	6
Strategic Outcomes What We Will Achieve With This Plan	7
Success Indicators	7
Appendix 1	10

Doorway to the Past, Present and Future: The Next Chapter

In response to the appointment of the new Library Director, the Director, the Board of Trustees and Planning Committee began a strategic planning process in order to set a direction for the future of our Library. They met during this planning process to determine how the library would respond to the challenges and needs of the community.

Library Trustees, the Friends of the Library, The Library Foundation, staff, and Morristown and Morris Township residents participated in the discussions that resulted in this plan. More than 65 people attended either a focus group or town meeting to share their ideas for the library's future and another 1100 residents and other library users completed our online survey, providing us with invaluable information about the library's success in meeting their needs.

Understanding our Community

Through the process of community engagement we learned about the needs and the hopes of the library patrons and potential patrons. We heard about the need to:

- Review the library's current collection and meeting spaces
- Maintain collections with newer material on the shelves and strong print, media, and digital collections
- Encourage young professionals and other Morristown and Morris Township residents, who may not use us now, to actively use the library
- Maintain the role of the library as the cultural, social, civic and intellectual center of the community
- Increase access to technology
- Maintain and enhance meeting and quiet study space
- Play an increased role in connecting residents with one another as well as other organizations in town
- Increase awareness of the library's mission, collection, programs and facility

Our Vision for the Future

We change lives by helping people learn and grow.

We never stop learning. Our library's public programs, extensive content and collections, knowledgeable staff and innovative valuable services help people have fun, find fulfillment and realize their potential at all stages of life. The library is the community's learning partner.

We build community through social engagement. We bring people together in a safe and welcoming environment to explore new ideas, promote discussion and civic engagement. Our library helps us understand one another and work together.

Our vision is best summed up by a patron who said:

"For me, the library is the place that wants to take you in-where the weary find rest and the restless find stimulation; where ideas come alive, discoveries are made, imaginations take flight and, too, where jobs are located, prices are determined, trips planned, languages learned, friends gather, and strangers meet. It is where the community creates its home."

Mission Statement

Our Library provides residents with reading materials, access to technology and continuing education, self-improvement, enjoyment and information. We achieve this by providing a location for the dissemination of state and local documents, New Jersey history sources and materials that will support Historic Preservation research. We are the keystone for our two communities. Our mission is:

TO PROVIDE THE RESIDENTS of Morristown and Morris Township with current reading materials, programs and materials for continuing education, self-improvement, enjoyment and information.

TO PROVIDE A LOCATION for the dissemination of state and local documents, New Jersey history sources, materials that will support Historic Preservation research for Morris area residents, and information pertinent to awareness of governmental, cultural, recreational and business activities in the local area and to preserve these records for future generations in the Library's archives. We are committed to the historic preservation of the Morristown & Morris Township Library building located at 1 Miller Road in Morristown.

TO PROVIDE THE CHILDREN of Morristown and Morris Township with recreational materials and information sources which will stimulate and help improve reading skills and encourage the formation of a well-rounded individual. To communicate and cooperate with the Morris School District and other area schools to encourage reading and to aid students in learning research skills which will be valuable to them in later life.

TO PROVIDE THE AGENCIES, ORGANIZATIONS, CLUBS AND OTHER GROUPS in the Town and Township with information that will meets their current needs.

Strategic Outcomes: What We Will Achieve with This Plan

Our planned strategic outcomes will be accomplished through the following goals:

Goal 1- Secure the place of the library as a lively center for thought and ideas, discussion and learning, as the place that brings people together and facilitates civic engagement.

Goal 2- Promote the library as the place for lifelong learning and personal growth.

Goal 3- Deliver convenient and innovative library services, both in person and online services that respond to changing community needs.

Goal 4- Create a secure financial future for the Morristown and Morris Township Library

Success Indicators:

- The community responds to the strategic plan and provides the political and financial support needed to continue it
- The library continues to be recognized as the civic anchor of downtown, a partner with local businesses, and a driver of the town's economic vitality
- All segments of the community are engaged in the library with increased use by teens and 20-45 year olds
- The library receives positive press coverage
- Library use continues to grow
- Morristown and Morris Township residents continue to consider the library as one of the most valued community assets

Strategic Planning Committee

Nancy Bangiola
Anne Bertucci
Geoff Brooks
Dave Fadden
Debbie Gottsleben
Don Kiel
Norma Mortimer
Patricia Murphy
Lisa Price
Michael Rogers
Linda Stamato
Mary Jo Woodford

Board of Trustees

Nancy Bangiola, President
Dave Fadden, Vice-President
Lisa Price, Secretary
Geoff Brooks, Treasurer
Patricia Murphy
Anne Bertucci
Debbie Gottsleben, Dr. Ficaro, Superintendent of Schools Alternate
Don Kiel, Mayor Mancuso's Alternate
Michael Rogers, Mayor Dougherty's Alternate

Staff

Mary Lynn Becza
Chad Leinaweaver
Maris S. Norton
Arlene Sprague

Consultants

Library Development Solutions
Leslie Burger
Alan Burger

Appendix I

Morristown & Morris Township Library

A Summary of Comments by local area residents about the

Morristown & Morris Township Library

Prepared by

Library Developmental Solutions

Princeton, New Jersey

June 2012

Introduction	12
The Needs Assessment Process	12
Discussion of Findings	16
Initial Conclusions and Recommendations	18
Conclusion	19

Introduction

A series of focus group sessions and a town meeting were held in the spring of 2012 in the Morristown & Morris Township Library. Focus group participants were asked a set of open ended questions designed to stimulate discussion about the Library, its future, and its importance to the community. The discussions with the groups provide important information about Morristown & Morris Township residents' perceptions about the library as well as specific suggestions for future improvements.

In addition to the focus groups, an online and print survey was conducted, and has been completed by over 1100 respondents. Information from the survey about library use and needs will also be helpful to library planners. There were many similarities with regard to library usage among the groups. The consultants spoke with many of the frequent users of the library as well as with the infrequent users. They were recruited through the following:

- Library staff asking user, nonusers, readers, and nonreaders to participate
- Information in the local media
- Posted information in the library

The information from all of these efforts will be a valuable tool for the library director and members of the Library Board as they consider the future of the library needs of Morristown & Morris Township Residents.

The Needs Assessment Process

Focus groups are group interviews in which people are asked a series of open-ended questions in order to obtain information. In this case, it involved people's perceptions and attitudes about the Morristown & Morris Township Library. In Morristown, we explored satisfaction and dissatisfaction with current library services, as well as participants' vision of what an ideal library would be like. The data from these groups is helpful in obtaining a snapshot of where a community may be in the terms of its attitudes about libraries in general and about their own local library in particular.

The MMTL Board of Trustees hired Library Development Solutions, a library-consulting firm based in Princeton, New Jersey, to conduct a series of focus groups and a town meeting with community residents to elicit suggestions and ideas for the library's strategic plan. The purposes of the focus group sessions were to listen to the community concerns about the library and to provide participants with an opportunity to offer their ideas about the community's library needs. The library board believes that information from the focus groups and survey will assist in the director and the boards abilities to make important decisions about library resources.

Appendix I

The following are the topics that were discussed in the various groups:

- What is special about this community
- Changes that have taken place in the community in the past few years and currently
- Descriptions of an ideal Morristown & Morris Township Library
- Satisfaction with library services, collections, programs, and the library facility
- Community awareness about the library and its services

Focus Group Participants

• Students/ Teens	10
• Older Adults	6
• Civic, business and elected leaders	4
• Library Staff	18
• Parents of young children	11
• Teachers	2
• Community Organizations	5
• Town Meeting	7
Total	65

The sessions lasted approximately 1.5 hours each. Similar questions were asked of all groups. Comments from each session were recorded and transcribed to create a record of the meeting.

Each of the focus group sessions encouraged discussion about the future of library service. Participants appreciated the opportunity to engage in a dialogue about the library with other residents, and offered many helpful suggestions and ideas.

User Survey Participants

Over 1100 people have participated in the library user survey. They described their use of the library, offered suggestions for improvement, and commented about the library's image, its role in the community and other subjects, including their use of other libraries, especially during the reconstruction and restoration. They describe favorable experiences using the library and offered comments about improvements to the library experiences, including children and adult programming, computer instruction, and teen space and use. Approximately 15% of the respondents said that they are infrequent or non-users of the library. The responses are helpful in listening to findings post construction since many people reported going elsewhere during the past year. The survey relied on questions about library use and provided a number of opportunities for open ended comments. Library users and residents are

pleased overall with the library's services and resources and still want additional improvements after the renovation and restoration.

Summary of Key Findings

Focus group participants and survey respondents agreed on many issues and shared common concerns for the future of the Morristown and Morris Township Library. The following items describe areas of agreement and recurring trends mentioned by the participants.

- The Morristown & Morris Township community is described as a very diverse community of people who care about the quality of life and the life of the community. The local public school and public services are highly respected and in high demand. Morristown is the county seat and houses many judicial and social services for Morris County. Nearby Garden State Parkway, Routes 202, 24, 124, and 287 provide easy access to New York and elsewhere, as well as the Morris and Essex Line of the nearby Transit station. There are many young families who are choosing the Morristown and Morris Township as a home for their families bases on the reputation of the schools and the diversity of the community as well as the overall quality of life.
- As evidenced by the number of people who are filled out by the survey, residents show that they are about their community and feel that the Library has played an important part in connecting people with each other and as a central location for community life
- Survey respondents and focus group participants state that they are pleased with the operation of the library, especially since the loss of space and closings and the restoration, even though they are aware of the loss of resources since then, including programs and available materials. Many people recognize that the stature and image of the Library as one of the premier public libraries in Morris County was jeopardized during the renovation and restoration. They credit the director, staff, and board with putting the Library back together again, in spite of the challenges.
- More reliable and building wide Wi-Fi and computer instruction classes and assistance, and more weekend hours and programs are suggestions often made by the participants. Residents view the library as a place where they would like to browse for new books, and DVD's, as well as a family-friendly destination for the whole family for a variety of activities. They view the library as one of the primary social and cultural centers of their community.

The top frequent activities that people say they use the library for are:

- To borrow books (68.5%)
- To browse (58.7%)

Doorway to the Past, Present and Future

- To borrow DVD's (43.9%)
- To use computers (33.0%)

Other interesting responses in the survey specifically focus on the need for additional digital book titles. More hours, and more communication from the library, as indicated in these responses:

- Our town library is the best thing about Morristown already
- Better newer DVDs. Maybe make the library a little more modern
- 5 cents a page to print like the Morris County Library
- What is necessary is corrective action to restore the library to the culture it should be and was long ago. Morris County Library does not have this problem because discipline is enforced
- I would like to see more Spanish books
- Hours are amazing thanks! And policies, maybe change a little bit of the no phone policies like if we an emergency phone call I wouldn't like to go outside to answer it, like maybe you can make a little room on both floors for if you have an incoming call you can go to the place and take the phone call-that would be great
- Increase speed of inter-library loans procedures-order new copies if book and audiobook is missing
- It would be nice to bring back even more technology training classes in the library
- Expand the e-book collection
- Kindles, iPads and other e-book devices for borrowing
- An e-newsletter weekly which highlights the library services and programs. I often find out about programs after the fact

It is worthwhile also to note that 28.7% of survey respondents report that they frequently use an e-book reader. Also that 89.1% of respondents also use the Morris County Library and 18% also use the Madison Public Library. Out of the 768 people who responded to the question about other activities before or after they visit the library, 44% and 53.8%, respectively, say that they go shopping or get something to eat and 57.2% run an errand. Clearly the library is indicated as one of the drivers of the downtown economic activity considering these results.

- The top words that people use to describe the Morristown & Morris Township Library include:
 - Friendly
 - Resource
 - Excellent
 - Useful
-

2. The survey results are available in the Library.

Doorway to the Past, Present and Future

On the question of how important the Morristown and Morris Township Library is to you and your family and to the community, the following results from 1003 respondents are noteworthy

- Extremely important or very important to the community- 97.3%
- Extremely important or very important to me and my family-91.4%

And, according to some survey respondents:

“I never think of the town/township library because of parking. The Morris County Library is more accessible for my needs. I am 83 and have a handicap tag because of difficulty in walking. My main connection to anything these days is my computer.”

“Maybe expand the hours in August and July on Saturday, add more anime and graphic novels, more books for the young adults/teen sections”

“I love it! I love to read so love to browse and staff is always helpful and wonderful (esp. with book suggestions...)”

Discussion of Findings

When residents were asked what is special and unique about the Morristown & Morris Township community, they mentioned that it is a diverse and historic area that has many talented and engaged residents. Many of the community institutions would not exist today without the volunteerism and involvement of residents. They also said that it is a town with an excellent school system, varied housing stock and active downtown nightlife, restaurants and retail. Other comments include the following:

“It is a great place to spend nice time while doing homework, reading or researching” -Survey Participant

- Morristown infrastructure is amazing, many amenities for residents
- There is a thriving downtown business district and a vibrant night life
- Morristown is a very diverse community and has a high level of community involvement
- The performing arts center is a draw for the region

The library is a critical public institution in connecting residents to each other and to their shared sense of community.

What do you like about the Morristown & Morris Township Library?

“The location-great asset to the town-walking to the library is good for me and for other people too” -Focus Group Participant

Doorway to the Past, Present and Future

Focus Group Participants as well as survey respondents commented favorably about the things in the library that they like are satisfied with. Participants were quick to commend the library on its ability to adapt to the explosion and restore the library in such a short period of time. Comments include:

- The location downtown and across from the theater
- It is a walking library for some-good for me and other residents
- The children's programs are very good
- The DVD collection
- The History Center
- The staff is mostly friendly and helpful
- Free Wi-Fi
- Meeting room availability

Both residents and staff members said the library continues to improve in response to the residents' needs. They say that they library strives to be responsive to their interests and suggestions but also make the point that they Library suffered a setback during the past year during the renovation and restoration.

What would you like to improve?

"Need stronger Wi-Fi in all of building including the History Center"

- Focus Group Participant

"Sometimes it is difficult to find a quiet place to sit, especially on weekend"

-Survey Participant

"More research that can be accessed online would be nice"

-Survey Participant

Focus Group and Participant Comments

Comments included suggestions about hours, adult programming and collections. Availability of more current and new materials, and the library environment were among the top areas in which participants would like to see improvements. Participants commented about the need for increased communication from the library as well as additional programming for teens, children, and a richer offering of programs for adults. Comments covered;

- Computer classes in the evening
- More frequent book and author discussion and all adult programs
- A greater selection of downloadable ebooks would be excellent
- More copies of ebooks need to be available so there's a shorter wait using overdrive. There needs to be a longer loan period for ebooks
- Parking and traffic are the chief reasons I use the County Library. Perhaps you should look at programs and services of interest to those who live and work nearby

Doorway to the Past, Present and Future

- More technology instruction
- Have the Value Line online like the County Library does...trying to make copies of it manually is archaic
- More communication about the library to everyone in town
- Sustainable-green energy- using the library as a teaching space for green energy-learning laboratory-document what steps have been done toward sustainability.

What one thing would you change about the library?

In response to the suggestion that the participant could change one thing about the library, their comments reflected those areas that they care about the most and that they feel should receive priority. There were comments about the children's programs, parking suggestions and digital books. Also included were many comments about the library being used all day of clients of nearby social service agencies, who may at times may be disruptive.

- More engaging children programs, including movement and craft programs
- I would come more often if I could park easier
- More information about activities at the library
- Improve security and policies about disruptive people
- More best sellers
- Bigger more comfortable teen area
- Loan video games
- Better individual and group study space

Initial Conclusions and Recommendations

Most of the following conclusions and recommendation are derived from the comments expressed by the Morristown and Morris residents during the focus group sessions, town meeting and in the survey.

1. Communicate-Promote-Advocate

The Morristown & Morris Township Library is a vital institution that benefits residents of all ages in both communities, with many shared resources of collections of popular interest, historical information and research in the History Center and in an attractive and well maintained facility. Residents rely on the library for many things besides a new book to read or a place to sit for a while

The library, as many others, for many years, was well funded and was not especially pressured to communicate its mission, promote its resources, and build additional levels within the community. For

some residents of both towns, the library is present but does not play a prominent role in their lives.

2. Offer more technology instruction and additional access to changing and popular devices and content. Help close the growing digital literacy divide.

The Continuing challenge faced by libraries is how to teach staff and the public to use computers and other digital devices to support Internet searching, reading and other digital uses. Instruction in these skills had been popular at the Library when they were offered and that is why focus group and survey participants requested restoring these popular sessions and offering additional instruction in the use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook, internet searching, computer applications and all other skills involving the use of new hardware, or software, including eReaders. The library is expected, by residents to stay ahead of popular trends and uses of new digital formats and devices, and have them available for use.

3. Review and reinforce the library collection

Though aware of difficulty economic times and the recent restoration project in the library, customers expect to see additional copies of new best sellers, feature film and TV series DVDs, and many more digital titles. The library should review and update its collection development policy for both print and digital resources as people say that their main reason for coming to the library is for books, DVDs or as best seller. The library should also quickly remove all old and unused books and any non-circulating material to make room for newer materials or to repurpose space for other uses.

4. Leadership

Realign the library board and staff toward a common vision of library service. Work toward a greater role for the Library in the life of all residents.

5. Review and update, as needed, the MMT facility

Respond to and meet changing needs of the community by re-thinking specific areas and how they are used, and engage in re-thinking the use of all spaces in the library. The parameters of the recent restoration were dictated by the insurance guidelines. Use the great results of the restoration to re-think use of space to provide contemporary uses for residents. Some areas of the library today, though attractive, may be underused due to many factors availability of seating and traditional uses.

Conclusion:

Information from the focus groups and survey should be discussed by the library board, staff, and administration. They will be able to address the future needs of residents for computers, collections, communication, programs, services, and the facilities to meet changing community interest and needs. The next phase in this project is the development of a strategic plan that addresses the issues that have been raised here.