

Vision Statement

The Watertown Free Public Library strives to enrich the mind, spirit, and heart of every patron.

User Needs Assessment

Overview

Watertown is small city of 35,329 people living in a densely populated land area of four-square miles which runs along the Charles River. Watertown is considered one of the inner core communities of the Greater Boston region. It is the 48th most populous city in the state and 10th most populous city in the Minuteman Library Network (MLN).¹

Due to a variety of factors, including increased mixed-use residential development common in Greater Boston and an influx of life science and technology companies setting up in Watertown, population growth has exceeded the projections anticipated by 2020 in the 2015 Watertown Comprehensive Plan by nearly 4,000 and has increased by 10.7% since 2010.²

There are three public elementary schools, one public middle school, and one public high school along with a handful of private and parochial schools. It is home to some prominent local and national cultural institutions, notably Perkins School for the Blind, the Armenian Museum of America, Mosesian Center for the Arts, New Repertory Theater, and Mt. Auburn Cemetery.

Watertown follows a Council/Manager form of government and is currently undergoing the Town Charter review mandated every ten years. The library has an elected Board of Trustees consisting of six members elected for four-year terms every three years. In 2021 there are three seats up for election in November.

Renovated and expanded in 2006, the library is located on Main Street in the south-western quadrant with three off-site remote book returns. The library's off-site makerspace is located two blocks from the library in a donated retail space on the bottom floor of the Residences at Watertown Square, an assisted living facility. The library will reach its intended 20-year life in 2026. A new bookmobile is scheduled to launch in the second or third quarter in 2022.

¹ 2020 US Census

² Ibid.

Demographics and Community Environment

The data used here is a combination of 2020 US Census Data and American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year Estimates 2015-2019. The Census Bureau will not release its standard ACS 1-year estimates for 2020 because of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on data collection. As newer data from the results of the Census Bureau become available, they will be reviewed and considered in relation to this strategic plan. Any statistic about library patrons or usage is calculated using reporting functions in the Sierra Integrated Library System.

Age

Patron Age by Decade		
Decade	Total	% of Patrons
1900-1919	2	0%
1920-1929	69	0%
1930-1939	302	2%
1940-1949	997	6%
1950-1959	1572	9%
1960-1969	1720	10%
1970-1979	2443	14%
1980-1989	4105	24%
1990-1999	2511	14%
2000-2009	1890	11%
2010-2019	900	5%
2020-2021	31	0%
Unknown	781	5%

Watertown residents skew towards the 25-35 and 60+ age ranges with around 32% and 22% of the population respectively. Most households in Watertown do not include children; in 2019, 23.1% of households made up the 2,608 school aged children which is much lower than the state average. While current enrollment in schools is lower than the state average, the percentage for children under 5 is higher than the state average, which may increase future school enrollment.³

Of the over 17,000 patrons with a Watertown coded patron type, 38% were born between 1980 and 1999, the majority of whom would be considered Millennials. This tracks with the “Millennial Peak” archetype that Watertown is typed as by the Massachusetts Housing Partnership.⁴

Source: Minuteman Library Network

³ ACS 2015-2019

⁴ Watertown Housing Plan

Race and Ethnicity

Watertown Race and Ethnicity			
	% of population 2010	% of population 2020	% change from 2010 to 2020
White alone	84.0%	74.6%	-2.7%
Black or African American alone	3.0%	3.6%	32.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	0.1%	0.2%	75.0%
Asian alone	7.2%	9.6%	46.6%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0.0%	0.0%	-85.7%
Some Other Race alone	2.1%	4.1%	119.3%
Population of two or more races:	2.7%	7.9%	228.1%
Hispanic or Latine	5%	7.7%	61%

12010 and 2020 Census. Hispanic/Latine data is an ethnicity category, so totals will not add up to 100%.

Watertown is diversifying more drastically than estimates previously predicted in the ACS. Although still predominately white, the percentage of white people decreased from 84.9% to 74.6% from 2010 to 2020. Conversely, most other categories increased significantly, the standout being an increase in population of people of two or more races by 1946 or 228.1%. The Asian population has increased by 1073 people or 46.6%, the Hispanic or Latine population by 1030 or 61%, the Black or African American population by 311 or 32.7%, and American Indian and Alaska Native by 30 or 75%.⁵

Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity (2020-21)		
Race	% of District	% of State
African American	4.3	9.3
Asian	7.2	7.2
Hispanic	19.1	22.3
Native American	0.4	0.2
White	63.6	56.7
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0	0.1
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	5.3	4.1

Source: Massachusetts DESE School and District Profiles

The student population in Watertown's public schools 2020-21 enrollment reflects more diversity than the general population in Watertown with white students at only 64% of total population, Hispanic or Latine students at 20%, and Asian students at 7%.⁶

The library does not collect patron data on race and ethnicity, but observational survey indicates that the patron base for the library is more diverse than the general makeup of Watertown, except for attendance for adult centered programming which tends to skew white and older.

⁵ 2020 US Census

⁶ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) School and District Profiles (2020-21)

Household Income and Housing

Household Income for Watertown Renters	
Household Income	% of Households
\$0-24,999	14.1%
\$25,000-49,999	11.8%
\$50,000-74,999	16.4%
\$75,999-99,999	16.8%
\$100,000-149,999	22.8%
\$150,000+	18.1%

Source: ACS 2015-2019

The median household income in Watertown was estimated at \$101,103 in 2019, but that number needs to be examined. The Greater Boston region is affluent and median incomes are high, but that hides the reality that many people are living on very modest incomes. Median incomes decrease significantly when considering factors such as gender, race, and renter/owner status. The ratio of renters to owners in Watertown is close to 1:1 with 7,436 renter-occupied and 8,062 owner-occupied. While Watertown meets the state regulations for providing affordable housing, the Watertown Housing Partnership has found that a “demonstrable need for additional affordable housing at a variety of income levels remains unmet.” As such, the Watertown Housing Plan prioritizes increasing deed-restricted affordable housing options in Watertown.⁷ Thus, the library can assume that despite high median incomes, the service population consists of people of various socio-economic backgrounds with potential to see more households with moderate incomes given the intended increase in deed-restricted affordable housing in the next five years.

Climate Preparedness

Watertown is preparing for the inevitable impact of climate change in its current trajectory with the creation of a Climate and Energy Plan that is due to be issued at the end of this year. The identified climate hazards in Watertown are intense storms, flooding, drought, and heat waves caused by shifting and more extreme precipitation and temperature patterns.⁸ The library has already experienced this impact from flooding. In recent years heavy rains have caused drain backups causing floods in the first-floor bathrooms that flooded into the server room, a vulnerable and expensive location to have flooding. Luckily no major damage has resulted from this problem, yet.

Making Watertown streets walkable and bikeable is one component of climate preparedness and includes creating bike friendly streets and dedicated bike paths. In 2020, an extension of the existing community bike path was built, a portion of which goes directly through the library parking lot along the rear of the library. If this extension is considered successful it will be made permanent at a future date. The library has a bike fix-it station in the front of the library and bike racks at both the front and rear exits. They are heavily used.

⁷ Watertown Housing Plan

⁸ Resilient Watertown Climate and Energy Plan One Pager

Languages

There is no official Town data on languages spoken in Watertown, but we can piece together a snapshot of the languages spoken in the community from a few different sources.

WFPL and Project Literacy

The 2019 WFPL Survey asked the question “what languages do you speak at home?” Of the 800 who responded to the question, all but 7 listed English, and most listed English only. Approximately 20% of respondents speak one or more languages in addition to English. Thirty-seven languages were listed, including ASL, and of those Spanish, French, and various dialects of Chinese were by far the most frequently mentioned with 25%, 15%, and 10% respectively.

Project Literacy is the library’s English language education program. Thirty languages other than English are spoken among the nearly 600 active students in the program. Of these thirty languages, the most spoken are Russian (14%), Portuguese (11%), Spanish (11%), Chinese (8%), Armenian (6%), Arabic (6%), Haitian/French Creole (5%), and Farsi/Persian (5%). Project Literacy is open to anyone who wants to learn to speak English, not only Watertown residents, but most students live in Watertown and surrounding towns.

Watertown Public Schools

Within Watertown Public Schools, 987 or 39% of students have a language other than English as their first language, that is almost double the percentage across Massachusetts in which 23% of students have a language other than English as their first language. Fourteen percent of Watertown students are considered English language learners meaning “a student whose first language is a language other than English who is unable to perform ordinary classroom work in English.”⁹ There are nearly 60 different languages other than English spoken among the students with the most common being Pashtu, Spanish, and Chinese.¹⁰

Watertown Housing Authority

The 2020 Watertown Housing Authority (WHA) Language Access Plan¹¹ outlines services for tenants who are Limited English Proficiency Persons (LEP) which is defined by Department of Housing and Urban Development as “persons who, as a result of national origin, do not speak English as their primary language and who have limited ability to speak, read, write or understand English.” Using regional data provided by the 2014-2018 American Community Survey for individuals that speak English less than very well, WHA prioritizes translation and

⁹ Massachusetts DESE

¹⁰ Watertown Public Schools System Wide Spoken Language report

¹¹ Watertown Housing Authority Language Access Plan

language assistance Chinese, Spanish, and Armenian speakers, in that order. The WHA Language Access Plan does make accommodation for languages identified by WHA staff.

Pandemic Impact

The library was closed for four months during the beginning of the pandemic. Patron use habits changed considerably, but demand for library services did not waiver. Some people pivoted to digital services which increased digital usage drastically with a 64% increase in use from March through October 2020.

Digital Circulation Comparison 2019/2020															
	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total	March-October	January-October
2020	6367	6288	7,922	10,209	10,760	10,192	9988	9927	8633	8423			88709	76,054	88709
2019	5508	5007	5636	5391	5727	5680	6242	6248	5674	5758	5,679	5934	68484	46356	56871
difference	859	1281	2286	4818	5033	4512	3746	3679	2959	2665	-5679	-5934	20225	29698	31838
% change	16%	26%	41%	89%	88%	79%	60%	59%	52%	46%	-100%	-100%	30%	64%	56%

Includes Overdrive, Hoopla, Kanopy, Acorn TV, Qello, and RB Digital Magazines

Even though hours and services were reduced for a significant amount of time, circulation saw only a small hit in summer 2020 when we re-opened and by December, circulation numbers were surpassing the previous year. The total circulation for fall 2020 was up 4% from the previous year, and December alone saw a 16% increase, despite door count decrease of roughly 70%. We expect usage habits to continue to fluctuate, but the library has remained important to library users.

Door Count				
	October	Nov	Dec	Total
FY20	40033	39923	32000	111956
FY21	10844	9136	9734	29714
MTM %Change	-73%	-77%	-70%	-73%

Physical Circulation				
	October	Nov	Dec	Total
FY20	51295	50378	47006	148679
FY21	49,857	49,901	54,608	154366
MTM %Change	-3%	-1%	16%	4%

Library Survey

Survey Results: How would you rate...						
	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied/Unsatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Don't Know
Collection	49%	40%	5%	2%	0%	4%
Customer Service	73%	22%	3%	1%	0%	1%
Online Services	35%	27%	10%	0%	0%	28%
Downloadable Collection	26%	26%	12%	2%	0%	34%
Programs	30%	31%	13%	1%	0%	25%
Building and Grounds	61%	31%	5%	2%	0%	1%
Technology	35%	31%	12%	1%	0%	21%
WFPL Web Presence	41%	36%	11%	1%	0%	11%

General

The library conducted a survey from September 24, 2019, through February 15, 2020. There were 871 responses. Note that this survey data is pre-pandemic, and it remains to be seen what permanent changes to library use will come from the impacts of covid. Of the respondents, all had visited the library within the previous twelve months and 65% reported using the library at least once a week. The most popular uses of the library were checking out materials, using computers/internet, and attending programs. The age distribution of the survey skews older with over 50% of respondents were 55 or older, but this question was unanswered by many.

Survey Findings

The most valuable information gathered in the survey were the comments which included high praise, constructive suggestion, and some hard-to-hear critique. Throughout the comments six themes emerged: Staff, Fostering Community, Space, Timeliness, Traditional Library Services, and More. Most of the feedback was positive, but there was enough criticism to warrant reflection and work to improve. It is important to remember that survey results came exclusively from people who use the library and non-users are not represented in this analysis.

Staff

Staff were frequently described as friendly, warm, polite, helpful, smart, proactive, responsive, and kind. The expertise and human connection that library staff provide are an essential part of the library experience. While the highest survey remarks went to staff and customer service with roughly 95% satisfied or very satisfied with service, there were many critiques about unfriendly service in the comments section. It was also noted the racial diversity on staff reflects neither the racial composition of the community at large nor the patron base of the library.

Space

Comments on the atmosphere and library facility indicate that people need the library as a space as much as they need the services and materials that are provided by library staff. The library atmosphere is described as clean, warm, fun, inviting, and accessible. Hours of operation are strong, although some still want even more than the 70 weekly hours we are already open. Ninety-two percent of respondents were at least satisfied with the building and grounds. With all that we do, people still want more. More meeting rooms, study rooms, and places to study, read, and connect. Pair this with the fast-growing population, it appears to be evident that WFPL is reaching its capacity and needs to plan to expand and that needs to be soon.

Fostering Community

Without a dedicated community center in Watertown, it is clear the library has taken on that role for many people. People are looking for opportunities to engage with their community through programs and events as well as by simply meeting to chat and connect with each other. The library provides those opportunities for many. This theme is perhaps the most difficult to analyze because fostering community is going to mean a lot of different things to the many different people the library is serving. It also may arguably be the most important theme to dedicate time to understanding because it is the foundation of providing kind and compassionate service. It will take special attention to the ways in which the library needs to improve in order to foster community for those who aren't finding that at the WFPL, including outreach to non-users. This is something the newly created Outreach Department will be deeply involved in understanding and ultimately fostering community.

Timeliness

When the survey was administered the library was commended for staying relevant and up to date with technology, books, programs, and other services. Timeliness and responsiveness have become even more crucial in light of pandemic impacts to service. Already some permanent changes have come as a direct result of covid such as the installation of an outdoor locker system for holds pickup coming in fall 2021 as well as reduction of desktop computers in favor of increasing circulating laptops. WFPL staff proved adept at pivoting service throughout covid, and the community was exceedingly grateful for it. Remaining agile for as long as covid is a community health risk is a requirement for library operations.

Traditional Library Services

The following list, while not exhaustive, is a summary of the types of services and qualities that were praised by survey responders.

Staff	Children's Room	Space
Programming	Hatch	Curbside
Local History	Adaptability	Digital Programming
Non-traditional collections	Social Media	Community Engagement
Collections	Creativity	Project Literacy
Technology	Variety	Café
Website	Collaboration	Covid responsiveness
Budget	Innovation	Reader's Services
Tech/Computer classes	Children's programming	Summer Reading
One Book, One Watertown	Cleanliness and Maintenance	Customer Service
MLN	Hours	Current
Accessibility	Culturally inclusive	Forward thinking

Survey Results	
% patrons answered "don't know"	
Downloadable Content	34%
Online Services	27%
Programs	24%
Technology	21%
Web presence	11%

Collections, programming, and online resources are still highly relevant to the people who use them but given that survey responses came exclusively from library users the high percentage of people who responded “don’t know” about specific services shows there are opportunities for patron education.

Downloadable Content and Online Services

In this context downloadable content is referring to ebooks, audiobooks, movies, magazines, and newspapers that can be accessed from Overdrive, Hoopla, or any other platform used to access materials. Even though 52% of people responded satisfied or better, it is the lowest scoring category on satisfaction and one of the higher scores with dissatisfaction at 2%. This collection was noted as in need of more development, particularly ebooks and downloadable audiobooks. Many patrons noted that wait times are too long for ebooks and audiobooks, the collection lacks depth, and there are too many platforms to navigate.

“Online services” are services and resources the library provides online through the library website, email, or other platform such as research databases, local history documents, online reference questions, etc. It was commonly noted that patrons don’t know how to use the different services available.

Programming

There are clear standouts for library programming, particularly children’s, Hatch, and Project Literacy, and among people who attend programs there is a lot of satisfaction. However, given that library programming is a core WFPL service in which many staff hours are committed, the 40% of people who don’t know about programming or have no opinion on programming is compelling information that programming needs to be deepened, expanded, and better promoted.

Technology

ACS 2015-2019 Computer and Internet Use			
	Watertown	MA	US
Households with a computer	93.4%	91.4%	90.3%
Households with a broadband internet subscription	91.2%	86.4%	82.7%

Watertown has a higher percentage of people with in-home computer and internet access¹² which may account for the 33% of people who don’t know or have no opinion about library technology. Still, using computers/internet was the third most selected reason for visiting the library in the survey. When we started circulating laptops for home use during covid, our circulating laptop collection quickly required placing a hold to use one because they are almost always all checked out. The same is true of the mobile Wi-Fi hotspots we’ve added to the collection. Regardless of the relatively high computer and internet access numbers in Watertown, there is still a clear need to provide basic technology.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

The WFPL is committed to putting forth deep action and change, recognizes the urgency of this change and acknowledges that deep, structural systems of harm cannot be undone quickly or alone. Just as the library as an institution has work to do to create a truly inclusive environment, so too does the Watertown community. While comments on the 2019 survey were overwhelmingly constructive, there were enough homophobic and xenophobic comments to demonstrate that EDI work is needed as a community.

EDI must be woven into everything—every policy, collection, program, service, design decision, and library interaction. For this reason, there will not be a stand-alone EDI priority.

¹² ACS 2015-2019

3 Year Priorities

This strategic plan was made a short three years intentionally. Because the impact covid will have on operations will continue to change, and because the growing community needs a larger library, this plan should act as a bridge to the next phase of the library which we hope will mean an expansion of the physical space.

Center the Library Experience

- Create conditions in which all library interactions are friendly, courteous, and compassionate.
- Provide a comfortable and welcoming space for all people to use and enjoy without unnecessary assistance.
- Provide a variety of modes to use and interact with the library that accommodate the varied needs of patrons.

Engage in Reciprocal Communication

- Communicate about the library in ways that people understand.
- Create opportunities for people to express their library needs.
- Build collaborative relationships with local organizations to deepen our service to the community.

Expand audience

- Bring library services off-site and into the community.
- Build staff, collections, programs, and services that reflect, understand, and respect the unique people in Watertown.
- Reimagine policies, procedures, and service models to focus on welcoming people into the library.

Remain flexible

- Adjust covid-related policies and procedures based on recommendations from the scientific and medical communities along with state and local government policies.
- Build creative systems to evaluate library services that facilitate thoughtful and compassionate change.
- Prioritize solutions that are mobile, adaptable, and customizable.

Plan for Growth

- Create a library expansion plan that considers community needs, budget, staffing, and physical space.
- Find a suitable permanent home for Hatch in a library- or Town-owned property.
- Make decisions that are environmentally responsible, sustainable, and that consider the impact climate change will have on the library in the next 20 years and beyond.

Planning Methodology

Strategic Planning Committee

Iyswarya (Ash) Abayamani, Community Member	Joe Ferreira, Library Assistant
Kazia Berkley-Cramer, Children's Librarian	Leanne Hammonds, Trustee
Caitlin Browne, Assistant Director	Mike Hanlon, Trustee
Julia Carpenter, Community Member	Emily Izzo, Trustee
Leone Cole, Library Director	Teddy Kokoros, Trustee
Daniel D'Amico, Community Member	Daniel Pritchard, Trustee
Marie Danziger, Community Member	Rose Mary Su, Community Member
Sheppard Ferguson, Trustee	

This strategic planning process began in September 2019 when we distributed a survey over the course of three months. In that same time, we searched for community members to serve on the strategic planning committee. We chose 5 out of the 31 applicants to join along with library administration, staff members, and Trustees. We attempted to put together another small group of people to do direct canvassing to distribute the survey to library non-users, but that failed.

Committee meetings began in January 2020 but were stopped abruptly in February because of the pandemic. We resumed meeting in January 2021, via zoom. Shortly after resuming meetings, we distributed an Accessibility Survey and Staff Strategic Planning Survey over the course of one month.

Separate from strategic planning efforts, the Teen Department assembled a group of middle- and high schoolers to provide feedback and vision for the teen room. This information was shared with and considered by the planning committee.

From January through May the committee met monthly to examine and discuss the data we'd compiled from the various surveys and demographic data. The plan was written in summer 2021 by Caitlin Browne.

Within the last 6 years several new planning documents for Watertown have been created or are in process of creation, some of which are influential to the library and are referenced and summarized in this user needs assessment.

Governing Body Approval

The committee reconvened in September to review the draft and final approval was granted by Trustees on October 6, 2021.

Referenced Sources

Comprehensive Plan (2015)

<https://www.watertown-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/14558/2015-Watertown-Comprehensive-Plan---Adopted-June-23-2015>

Parking Management Plan (2019)

<https://www.watertown-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/27911/Parking-Management-Plan-Executive-Summary-and-Strategies>

Public Arts Master Plan (2020)

<https://watertownpublicartsandculture.wordpress.com/watertown-public-art-master-plan/>

Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (2021)

<https://www.watertown-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/31739/Watertown-Bike-Ped-Plan-March-2021>

Housing Plan (2021-2025)

<https://www.watertown-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/31207/2021-02-09-Watertown-Housing-Plan>

Community Preservation Plan (2021-2025)

https://www.watertown-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/32697/CPC_PLAN_2021_0715-FINAL

Resilient Watertown Climate & Energy Plan (estimated completion December 2021)

https://www.watertown-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/32244/Watertown_Climate_Plan_One-Pager_final?bidId=

Watertown Housing Authority Language Access Plan (2020)

<https://watertownha.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Language-Access-Plan-2020.pdf>

Digital Appendix

A digital appendix with the information below is available at www.watertownlib.org/plans.

2020 Survey Results

Committee Meeting Minutes

Accessibility Survey Results

Staff Strategic Planning Survey Results