



RUSSELL  LIBRARY

Strategic Plan 2013 – 2017

Letter from the Board President

I firmly believe that there is something magical about walking into the Russell Library, with its numerous rooms, all filled with ideas. This Library, home to countless visions of writers, filmmakers, artists, business people and dreamers for 137 years, has been a haven for the citizens of Middletown in the chill of winter and heat of summer, in the din of wars and days of Depression. People eagerly come to workshops, literary discussion groups, concerts, play readings and to get lost in a book. People come to find jobs and long-lost friends, to read the newspaper, surf the internet and ask questions. They see the world changing at its (usual) rapid pace and hope to just to cling to the jet trails and not be left behind.

We understand that our community and the world is changing every day. How the Russell Library embraces the changes, both known and unforeseen, is the focus of this Strategic Plan. The Planning Committee and its Facilitator first listened to the voices on the surveys, from the patron interviews, from the staff members and City residents; they then began the task of assembling those opinions, ideas, criticisms and visions into a Bridge to the Future for not only the Library but also the greater Middletown Community.

The surveys used to create this Plan uncovered an impressive swath of topics, from computer use to space issues to the need for more meeting rooms to the dearth of parking spaces to the desire for increased and varied programming for residents of all ages. As the Planning Committee and the Board sift through these and all the recommendations, we will create our own “action list”, a yearly set of goals posted on-line and in the Library, to let everyone know that this Strategic Plan is not just a document to be read at our leisure but a manifesto for action, a broadside for change, positive change.

And the fact that the Strategic Plan is now a published document does not mean that it is finished. President John F. Kennedy said “Change is the law of life.” The residents of Middletown and the patrons of Russell Library need to know that every minute the doors are open, we want to hear from you, that your ideas and your needs feed our energy and our planning.

Together, we will build the Bridge to the Future of Middletown.

Thank you all! Here’s to a healthy future.

Richard B. Kamins,

President, Board of Trustees of the Russell Library



Russell Library

Strategic Plan 2013 – 2017

Our Goal

This Strategic Plan for the years 2013 to 2017 outlines our plans for a future where the Library plays an even more active role in the community for a broader range of users.

Russell Library will be the Bridge to the Future of Middletown and its citizens.

The Library will continue to be adaptable, inventive, responsible and powerful.

We start now to begin a transition to a digital age where immediacy, responsiveness and an abundance of information will be matched by a requirement to provide more services to more in the community – those with needs, those with interests, those with purpose, and those with joy at heart – all deserving of the best this Library and community can provide to them as unique individuals.

Our Future

Russell Library will be a leader in the community with a focus on literacy and learning, success and achievement, and intercultural bridging.

It will be the “go to place” for families, friends, groups and individual users.

It will be fun and inviting, welcoming, comfortable and convenient for all.

Our collections will be targeted to our users’ needs, and easy to find. Our programs will appeal to even more of our users. Our information will be more available, our technology up to date, our staff more accessible and with multiple ways to engage Library users.

We will have enough well-lit, well-appointed spaces for groups to meet and plan, discuss and learn. There will be quiet spaces, active spaces, meeting spaces. Our community room will be large enough to fulfill the needs of the community, with technology and appointments to match the purpose of the events and presentations.

We will be efficient and financially stable, with an updated building infrastructure.



Our Process

Each year a collaborative partnership of the Board, administration, staff and community groups will work together to develop specific, targeted and measurable operational goals. We will provide sufficient resources to achieve the goals. At the end of the year we will review detailed progress for each of the goals against the measurements we established, identifying successes and failures. We will report our conclusions publicly, display them in the library, invite and consider public response and will then develop the next set of annual goals through the same collaborative process.

Our Profile

Russell Library will not be able to achieve our intent alone. We will develop structured partnerships with the City and its agencies, schools, colleges and universities, community not-for-profit and business groups. We will form advisory groups of skilled citizens, and we will solicit input from the many unique individuals in this community who are looking for opportunities to support the Library and the community.

We will be an engaged, proactive partner to all. We will provide leadership as needed, and accept responsibility for meeting our goals.



Russell Library and the Middletown Community

Russell Library and Middletown Today

Russell Library is today the Gateway to the Future – for the Middletown community and for its users. It provides

- 🌟 A broad range of resources – books, DVDs, music, electronic databases;
- 🌟 An engaged and supportive staff – ready with carefully selected information, advice to children, teens and adults about what to read or view, guidance to resources for those looking for learning or employment;
- 🌟 Interesting and enlightening experiences – story times, music and author events, carefully planned exhibits.

We provide our resources at no cost to those with no other option; we provide convenience for those who can choose another option; and we want to challenge the interest of those looking for self-development or an engaging experience.

Despite the broad range of Library use, we know we can do better.

Our users told us, in focus groups, public forums, surveys and interviews, that they respect the role the Library plays in the community, love its commitment to the values of Middletown and love the attention they receive from staff members. But they tell us they want us to provide

- 🌟 more books of current interest
- 🌟 a broader and deeper range of programs for adults, teens and children
- 🌟 easier access to staff members
- 🌟 better information about events and new resources
- 🌟 more up-to-date technology
- 🌟 comfortable places to sit and read and talk to their friends
- 🌟 more meeting spaces
- 🌟 a focus on a broader range of the community.

And since they are our friends, they've told us that lighting is inadequate in some spaces and that we need to do a better job cleaning, and to touch up the paint.



Russell Library and Middletown Tomorrow

Middletown will be more diverse, with a broader range of interests, perspectives, strengths and purposes.

For many in the community, technology will play a larger role in their lives – at work, at home, in communication with their friends and family, in the way they seek and find information, entertainment and experiences.

Some in the community will be involved in the difficult search for a means to a livelihood. Others will have moved to a point in their lives where they are hoping to address new personal challenges – learning a new skill, a new language, addressing interesting problems and issues, combining with friends and acquaintances in a search for intellectual stimulation. Still others will continue to want to find a moment to themselves, a book to enjoy and carry them away to an imaginary world, a stimulating evening of culture or learning, a video to watch with family. And for the children in the community, there will always be the magic of a world opening up before them, a world to touch, laugh at, learn about and explore.

The community may be comprised of 50,000 citizens, but each will be an individual with unique interests, needs, goals and aspirations. Russell Library must be able to provide responsive, thoughtful and focused services, resources and experiences to every one of its users. And more of the members of the community must become users if we are to be a true partner in developing the future of Middletown.

However, if all that Russell Library can accomplish in the future is to provide better services to more individual users, we will have failed in our mission. To succeed, we must become a cultural, learning, entertainment, and resource-rich center for all of the community, a place where members of the community with different backgrounds, interests and values can meet and form bonds to strengthen the fabric of the community.

How will we do this?

With partnerships, better skills and organization, updated technology, financial strength, innovative and forward-looking initiatives, and a friendly, caring and hospitable space where many can come together in an exercise of community and democratic ideals.



Russell Library Strategic Plan Elements for 2013 to 2017

1. Community Leadership

We will become a leader in bridging the Middletown of today to the Middletown of tomorrow by forming structured partnerships that will enable the Library to extend its reach and share its resources so that we all can provide enhanced benefits to the community.

- 1.1 Expand collaboration with not-for profit community organizations to match their expertise and skills with the Library's resources, and provide a cost-effective expansion of services.
- 1.2 Revisit cooperative opportunities with all schools in the community, both public and private, to engage a full range of students at the earliest age possible, and continue to attract students to the Library through to graduation.
- 1.3 Partner with youth agencies to provide a richer set of resources for teens.
- 1.4 Look for opportunities to match the Library's resources, especially in the area of technology and job search, with local community service providers.
- 1.5 Form strategic partnerships with local businesses and business organizations to promote mutual interests.
- 1.6 Form advisory groups in the areas of programming, technology and operational efficiency and invite skilled, experienced community members to join in providing the Library with advice and information.
- 1.7 Enhance the Library's ability to communicate with all members of the community by developing a unifying message, using more social network communication channels and upgrading the website.
- 1.8 Invite all members of the community to unite in an annual series of events to identify and celebrate the community's values.

2. Effectiveness and Efficiency

We will aggressively upgrade the Library's operations and strengthen its financial status.

- 2.1 Provide the resources for an expansion of staff development opportunities to enhance current strengths and develop new skills.



- 2.2 Form combined staff and administrative innovation teams to identify, plan and develop new services.
- 2.3 Identify opportunities to streamline Library operating functions so that more staff will be available for patron-facing activities
- 2.4 Utilize new and updated technology to leverage staff effectiveness, including installation of self-check stations, a new phone system, Wi-Fi with a reach throughout the building, and an upgraded catalog.
- 2.5 Consolidate staff offices to promote collaboration and efficiency.
- 2.6 Accept payments by credit card, online and in the Library.
- 2.7 Evaluate the focus and direction of the Friends book sale activity to determine the optimal combination of volunteer time, space used, timing of sales and financial results.
- 2.8 Empower staff members to identify grant opportunities and bring them forward for consideration.
- 2.9 Broaden the Library's fundraising base and evaluate the potential of annual fundraising events.

3. Inventiveness

We will adopt a more active and forward-looking profile to address our patron's interests in the areas of our collections, our services and our programs.

- 3.1 Undertake a User Experience (UX) audit to assure the Library meets its patrons' needs in the most effective manner.
- 3.2 Enhance our collection development plan to provide more current fiction and non-fiction books for all ranges of interest, so that Library users will be able to find an item of specific interest during a visit.
- 3.3 Match the growing interest in eBooks and, in the future, eZines by re-allocating resources to acquisitions in these areas.
- 3.4 Consolidate and update the Library's technology resources so that they can be used by individuals and groups with differing interests and styles.
- 3.5 Make iPad and other current technology available in the building, including for teens and children's use.
- 3.6 Expand the Library's program offerings to provide adult programs of interest to a broader range of the community, add teen programs and expand the number of school-age programs for children.



4. Russell Library as a Place

To achieve its goals, Russell Library will become an even more welcoming, hospitable and comfortable cultural center of the community. Patrons will be able to find the resources they want quickly and conveniently, engage with staff, and meet with their friends and peers to study, to talk and to learn, in quiet contemplation or comfortable discourse.

- 4.1 Update the Library's lighting and finishes.
- 4.2 Develop an optimized shelving plan to make it easy to locate books, DVDs and music.
- 4.3 Consolidate the desks at the entry to the Library to provide circulation and reference services as patrons enter the building. Reorient the existing reference desk to provide a primary focus on technology support and management.
- 4.4 Wherever possible in the building, increase the amount of comfortable seating.
- 4.5 Update the technology in the Hubbard Room and provide more comfortable seating.
- 4.6 Expand the Teen Space and add technology
- 4.7 Partner with a local vendor to provide coffee in the Library
- 4.8 In the absence of sufficient meeting rooms, identify places where patrons can meet to discuss common interests, or study together, without disturbing others.

We look to the future of Middletown with purpose and a firm commitment to provide a strong, modern and responsive bridge for the community and our users.



The Planning Process

The Strategic Planning Committee began work in June 2012.

The Committee chose to work towards a focused planning process, with a bias towards identifying immediate needs that require action in the near term, and long term solutions directed to transforming the role of Russell Library in the community.

The Committee engaged assistance to solicit public input in a number of venues.

More than 600 community residents provided comments and recommendations using a survey that was distributed online and was available for completion in the Library.

Two public forums were held, seven focus groups (including three of library staff members) addressed matters of common interest, and a dozen community residents agreed to be engaged as individuals in sustained discussion of their thoughts and recommendations.

Statistical data from the Library and comparative Connecticut libraries was reviewed to provide a baseline for evaluation.

The Committee met on four occasions to review the process of the planning process, discuss alternative action items, and to determine the elements of the Plan.

The Plan was reviewed in draft by the Library Board, and subsequent to approval, was presented for comments at a public forum.

This Strategic Plan will guide Russell Library actions for the period 2013 to 2017.

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