From the Director:

On behalf of the Russell Public Library staff, trustees, and volunteers, I am pleased to present our five-year Strategic Plan. This strategic plan has taken demographic data and individual feedback from our community residents and leaders and used this data to craft a plan which will guide the services, acquisitions, and programs of the library from fiscal year 2027 through fiscal year 2031.

The Russell Public Library is, and has been, an outstanding library among towns with a population of under 5,000 people. We have been privileged to be well-funded by the town, which allows us to provide more materials and more consistent and diverse programming for all ages than many libraries of our size. Additionally, we are open significantly more hours than the state mandated minimums. In order to ensure that the quality of our services remains high, we needed a definitive plan to chart a course of action for the next five years, ensuring that our direction was clear, and our decisions moved us toward an objective goal.

Another reason for moving ahead with a strategic plan at this time is to enable us to be eligible to apply for grants from various sources. The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, the Massachusetts State Historical Records Advisory Board, Mass Humanities, and other state and Federal programs require libraries to have a strategic plan in place in order to qualify for grant funding. This plan is a vital step in obtaining eligibility for potential funding for special library and/or community projects.

In this strategic plan, we have presented a framework of the priorities and goals that will guide Library services for the next five years, based on what we have learned from our months of community engagement, data collection, consultations with the Massachusetts Library System, and staff, trustee, and volunteer insights and experience. We have further identified specific, measurable objectives to ensure that these priorities are being met.

Library staff and trustees will review this plan annually, and will revise our actions plan to best respond to developments which may arise after the publication of this strategic plan, while still focusing on our stated strategic priorities. Public feedback regarding the strategic goals and priorities set forth in this plan is always welcome.

Thank you to the staff, trustees, patrons, volunteers, and community members and leaders who contributed to the development of this strategic plan.

Moving forward together

Jennifer Waldorf, Director
Russell Public Library

Russell Public Library Vision Statement:

The Russell Public Library seeks to be an integral part of the Russell Community. We offer a welcoming and engaging space for all people to gather, read, learn, and create.

Russell Public Library Mission Statement:

Russell Public Library is a dynamic space offering multiple avenues of engagement for a broad community, ensuring that everyone feels welcome, safe, respected, and supported in their needs and endeavors.

Data Collection Methodology:

The staff and trustees of the library, wanted to ensure that they had availed themselves of all opportunities to gather data about the needs, preferences, and demographics of the people of Russell, in order to make the most informed choices regarding our strategic goals and objectives.

As the first step of data gathering, our staff looked at multiple websites that presented demographic data for the town. This data allowed us to give a broad answer to the question “Who is the typical Russell patron?”, and helped guide our decision to take a closer look at programming, to ensure that we are providing the type of programs our patrons desire, on the days and times that work for them.

Two separate patron/resident surveys were conducted one year apart. The first survey only received approximately 25 responses, which led to the decision to conduct the second survey. The second survey was presented to the patrons and residents of the town in multiple ways, some of which utilized avenues of distribution that were not used during the previous survey, including sending out a flyer with a QR code link to the survey in every town resident’s tax bill. While this method did not reach rental properties, it did reach the majority of town residents. The survey was also available online, linked on our social media platforms, and embedded in both the library and the town websites. We approximately doubled our response rate with this survey, with around 50 people responding. It was noted that there were not 75 individual responses, as some patrons did fill out both surveys.

An additional survey was sent to every town department with questions that focused more on how the library could collaborate more effectively with the town, and what services the library might be able to provide for each of the town departments. This survey was placed in each department’s town mail slot, with a hard copy of the survey questions as well as a QR code link

to the survey. Unfortunately, this survey only netted two responses from the town departments and committees.

The final method used for data gathering was a series of three Open Forums that were designed to provide face-to-face feedback from residents. Martha Meacham from the Massachusetts Library System facilitated these three open forums. The first was a time for all staff, including substitute staff, trustees, and volunteers to provide feedback regarding the future direction of the library. The second was held at the Russell Senior Center. Based on the town demographic data ,we did realize that the average age of Russell residents is slightly higher than the average for Massachusetts as a whole, so we wanted to be certain that this demographic was presented with an opportunity to make their preferences known.

The third open forum was the least well attended, but perhaps the most visionary. Some of our library staff and trustees were able to hold an in-depth discussion with one of our select board members regarding the long-term future of the library, which was both enlightening and hopeful.

A summary of the information gleaned from these open forums can be found as an appendix to the digital version of this strategic plan, located on our website.

Goals and Objectives:

Using the above data, and in collaboration with the Library Trustees, five broad strategic plan goals were identified. Once these broad goals were identified, we then determined 3-6 action steps that we could take to begin reaching our goals.

Goal 1- Enhanced Communication - Expand, streamline and diversify communication about all library resources

1. Improve social media presence by creating more engaging and more frequent posts -
2. Create more dynamic electronic newsletters -
3. Research the location and type of signage that would be most effective in communicating information about the library
4. Seek out free event listing spaces online in the Hilltowns, and possibly broader, depending on topic and interest level
5. Investigate what other libraries use for 2-factor authentication, and investigate the potential for additional service through Comcast.

Goal 2 - More clearly define partnerships - Assess and develop partnerships with other organizations and individuals, defining roles and responsibilities to serve the greater good of the community

1. Create a working relationship with the local cultural council to apply for and receive grants.
2. Establish a relationship with local churches to collaborate on local community events.
3. Establish a more consistent schedule with the public health nurse for health related presentations and trainings.
4. Increase collaboration with the Rec Department.
5. Continue our collaboration with the Hilltown Community Health Center.
6. Establish a more consistent relationship with the Russell Police Department and their three annual events.

Goal 3 - Evaluate Programming - Evaluate programming and media needs of all sectors of the community and align the libraries budget, staffing, and resources to support those needs

1. Continue informal polling across diverse platforms to determine what types of active and passive programming patrons want.
2. Evaluate program costs compared to attendance and see which programs offer the best “value for money”
3. Find people in the community that would be willing to give presentations and workshops for a stipend as opposed to a fee.
4. Examine the schedule and attendance to maximize staffing time for programming.
5. Research community based education courses that can be made available at the library.

Goal 4 - Broaden our Revenue Stream - Investigate additional avenues of revenue

1. Seek sources and complete applications for grants.

2. Check with the town regarding regulations regarding alternative funding sources.
3. Find low-cost instruction for the director and staff to learn how to write effective grants.
4. Explore the feasibility and requirements of a friends group. Check with the town regarding regulations-
5. Make regular reports to the town through Select board meetings, to ensure transparency of all Library expenditures.

Goal 5 - Increase Awareness of Library Skills and Trends - Ensure that staff and trustees are kept up to date with evolving skills, expectations, technology and trends both within the Russell Public Library environment and the broader library landscape.

1. Explore trainings available from CWMARS, MLS, MBLC, etc. that are pertinent to each staff member's job duties.
2. Plan regular staff training sessions.
3. Cross train staff to do one another's tasks, to facilitate smooth operation of the library during times of staff turnover or absence.

Conclusion:

The library director, trustees, and staff will develop measurable benchmarks for each action item, which will be monitored and updated periodically throughout the next five years. We look to these goals and action items to help us in maintaining our focus as we seek to embody our Mission Statement of offering multiple avenues of engagement to our community, and our vision of being a welcoming and engaging space for all.