**B.**

**thinkGloucester Community Engagement Project Report**

**Connecting to Community | Listening to Community**

Presented by the Community Strategic Planning Committee

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**Executive Summary**

The Community Strategic Planning initiative invited the Gloucester Community to provide insight and input for the Gloucester Lyceum and Sawyer Free Library’s 2019-2024 Strategic Plan. Deborah Kelsey, Executive Director, asked the Community Strategic Planning Committee to “think beyond the usual” and employ an appreciative, open-inquiry approach to engage a representative sample of the population for feedback about the values, sense of connection and desires that motivate the community and, from this data, extrapolate recommendations for the library to innovate and evolve to become a hub for community, connection, access and learning in the heart of Gloucester.

Community Strategic Planning Committee formulated and developed an effective and extensive outreach campaign, branded thinkGloucester, to build awareness and engage community participation through a range of market research methods. It devised three primary research questions that synthesize to: 1) What residents’ value about Gloucester; 2) What they envision for its future; and 3) How the library might sustain these aspirations. Results were consistent with an overwhelming positive, supportive and appreciative perception and attitude of the value of the Sawyer Free Library in the community. Both qualitative and quantitative data sustain the view that the library is an essential social, educational and cultural institution in Gloucester.

While previous strategic planning processes had included community input, this was the first time the library had conducted such wide-ranging outreach to connect and listen to what the community wants for its future and how the library fits into that picture.

**Project Objectives**

The goal of the Community Strategic Planning initiative was to gather input for the Sawyer Free Library’s 5-year strategic plan, a requirement for state certification. The premise was to explore how people experience the inflection point in Gloucester’s community identity and the library as a reflection of Gloucester’s achievements and challenges. From this primary research focus, the objective of the thinkGloucester initiative has been to collect and extrapolate the will of the community to be incorporated into library staff and Board of Trustees’ strategic direction and align its institutional actions to sustain the library to serve and fulfill its mission for future generations. A integral purpose of the project was to communicate the library and Board of Trustees’ commitment to reengage, connect and listen to its constituents, and demonstrate renewed transparency, accessibility, and inclusion to active and dormant patrons.

Among the results achieved were these key objectives:

* Contribute community feedback to incorporate into the strategic vision and direction of the library’s 5-year Strategic Plan
* Create and execute a campaign to build awareness and engage participation in providing quantitative and qualitative feedback to the Board of Trustees and library director
* Collect the opinions and perspectives from across the broadest representative sample of the community to articulate and validate the interests, attitudes, and opinions of the population at-large
* Provide a baseline of community data on which the library’s annual plans will be developed and measured against, and a framework from which the Board of Trustees measure its annual accountability and performance metrics

**Methodology**

The Community Strategic Planning Committee, comprised of 10 community members, John Brennan, BOT President, and Katherine Prum, consultant, formed and began to meet in January 2018 to develop a plan to ask the community what it envisions for the future of Gloucester. The group met bimonthly at the Cape Ann Savings Bank Community Room through April, at which time the thinkGlocuester campaign launched.

The committee separated into three working groups to tackle the strategic components of the project: Vision/Themes, Virtual Marketing/Social Media, and Direct/Public Outreach. The Vision/Themes team developed the survey questions; Marketing/Social Media created the thinkGlocuester campaign with a branded website and social media presence on Facebook and Instagram; and the Direct/Public Outreach team designed the strategy to engage the public in participating in town hall style community meetings.

thinkGloucester became the branded identity of the project. The Marketing/Social Media team designed a logo and campaign launch plan that included both print and social media marketing activities. The Survey launched on April 19th and ran through June 30th. Every household (14,000+) in Gloucester received a thinkGloucester postcard, introducing the initiative and providing a QR code and bit.ly link to the survey. Soon after, press releases were sent to local newspapers and online community calendars with the survey call-to-action and the schedule of Library Dialogues: the series of 6 public meetings facilitated by Gloucester Conversations. Paper copies of the survey were also created and distributed at the library, the Grace Center, and Action (81 hard-copy surveys were collected from these locations).

With the launch of the thinkGloucester website and social media platforms, the committee reconvened to focus on promoting the survey and Dialogues through their personal and social networks. Marketing maintained a schedule of Facebook ads and event notices to increase visibility and expand the range of people who saw the promotions. Facebook ads consistently increased reach throughout the campaign period: by over 85% on April 22 at the start of the campaign, over 50% in early June and by 40% in the home stretch at the end of June. The thinkGloucester page netted a total of 178 followers and 175 likes. Instagram followers totaled 171.

The committee partnered with Gloucester Conversations, a local organization of committed volunteers trained to facilitate challenging community conversations using a structured, mediated framework. They were invaluable in designing a dialogue format, scripts and agenda in support of our goals. They provided small group facilitator training for the committee members and library staff, and created meeting materials including: communication agreements, participant handouts, feedback questionnaires. Lastly, they provided both at-large and small group facilitation at each community dialogue. In total, 12 people gave their time and talent to facilitating six Library Dialogues through May and June in Magnolia, Lanesville, Rocky Neck, and downtown at the Cruiseport and the library.

The Library Dialogues and the survey were promoted through a series of outreach activities. Flyers were posted across the city from Magnolia through Main Street to Rocky Neck and around Lanesville. Bookmarks were created for general distribution at the library and through networking: the tagline, *Connecting to Community* targeted the survey while *Listening to Community* promoted the final two dialogue sessions.The library staff also participated in promoting the campaign via the SFL website, direct conversations with patrons, and email announcements to its Constant Contact list. Additionally, Cape Ann Cinema donated a video ad which was shown during movie previews throughout the month of June.

The board of the West Parish PTO and the director of the Grace Center were both engaged directly to raise awareness and ask for their assistance in asking their constituencies to take the survey and/or attend a community meeting.

During this time, individual community influencer interviews were conducted by a committee member and the library director. And  a series of 4 focus groups consisting of community members representing a cross section (age, gender, community) of Gloucester’s population were completed.

In total, 580 surveys were collected. 96 community members participated in direct public outreach, including: Library Dialogues (51), Focus Groups (23) and Influencer Interviews (22). Another 35 participated in Wellspring House/Sawyer Free Library cosponsored focus groups representing Gloucester’s immigrant community. The total of 711 participants represents a 2.4% response rate, based on the 2017 census population of 30,172 residents.

**Findings Summary**

The feedback from all data sources is notably consistent in the cares, concerns, considerations and attitudes with respect to the research questions: What do you value about living in Gloucester?, What do you aspire to for its future?, and How does the library fit into that picture. Universally, participants were passionate in their feelings about Gloucester, lovingly describing its quirky character, community ties, quality of life and especially the abundance of natural amenities and scenic beauty. They all had a very strong sense of belonging, only desiring to increase their connections to place and people through more venues and vehicles to participate in community. Immigrant participants also appreciated Gloucester’s natural beauty, as well as it offered a peaceful, safe, hospitable place to raise kids, good schools, opportunities for employment and access to support services when needed. They viewed people as respectful and nice, “many good people who are kind to us”.

While people’s concerns for the future largely fell into the categories of affordable housing and gentrification, economic sustainability and opportunities, and the impact of climate change and the opiod crisis on the community, by and large everyone expressed optimism for Gloucester’s future. Responses from the immigrant participants also spoke of affordability as a concern especially daycare choices for school aged children. They also had a specific desire to have a mall or Hispanic supermarket in Gloucester.

Participants were very supportive and enthusiastic about the library and held positive views for the vital role it plays in the community. It was described in various thematic terms as a “Secular Sanctuary”, an “equalizer: free – belonging to no *one* group ”, a “community center: connecting Gloucester to itself”, an “access point to the world” of knowledge. They also shared aspirational desires for a library that was spacious, welcoming, comfortable, and inviting; respecting the past while meeting the technological and informational demands of an evolving community. Developmental programming such as English, math, computer and art classes, along with more foreign language resources, were among the specific desires the immigrant participants articulated for the library.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Nature / environment / beaches | 89.66% | 520 |
| Culture / arts | 69.31% | 402 |
| Community | 69.14% | 401 |
| Family / friends | 68.28% | 396 |
| History | 54.83% | 318 |
| Entertainment / dining | 51.03% | 296 |
| Healthy living / lifestyle | 40.86% | 237 |
| Proximity to Boston | 37.76% | 219 |
| Social diversity | 30.52% | 177 |
| Volunteer opportunities | 25.17% | 146 |
| Proximity to Northern New England | 24.66% | 143 |
| Work / employment | 22.24% | 129 |
| Faith community | 21.72% | 126 |
| Family legacy | 21.72% | 126 |
| Schools | 13.62% | 79 |
| Sports / fitness | 13.10% | 76 |
| Other (please specify) | 10.86% | 63 |
|  | **Answered** | **580** |

**Survey Results Summary**

 **Q1 What do you value about and/or what connects you to living in Gloucester?**

 Across all outreach methodologies there is consistent and positive consensus of the reasons people value and feel connected to living in Gloucester and on Cape Ann. The strongest factors participants expressed were the environment and natural beauty (89.7%), its rich creative culture (69.3%), and a deep sense of community and caring for each other (69.1%). Gloucester is universally considered unique with its blend of a rich cultural, working-class, and family-oriented heritage and a “gritty” resiliency and optimism for the future. Affordability, sustainable economic development, climate change, and the opioid crisis are the largely agreed challenges that concern the community and impact the outlook for Gloucester’s future.

Participants expressed a positive appreciation for Gloucester’s authenticity, its character, diversity and history. The greatest positive associations given for what connects people to living in Gloucester after community were family/friends (68.3%), history (54.8%), entertainment (51%) and healthy lifestyle (41%).

**Q2 Describe what would increase your sense of connection to Gloucester?**

Of the comments offered to what might increase people’s sense of connection to living in Gloucester, the majority of respondents expressed a deep satisfaction, e.g. “I feel very connected.”, “My connection is already at 100%.”, “Nothing else needed!” and “nothing....I am connected by blood, birth and fishing history.” Other sources of increased connection are opportunities to gather, share interests, and participate in community programming. Additionally people expressed a desire for more cultural, music and arts events as a means to extend their social networks. Issues of economic development, employment, affordability and greater diversity were also prevalent in comments about what would increase people’s connection. Additionally a desire for an easily accessible central source of community news and information was another vehicle to increase people’s sense of connection.

**Q3 How do you spend your free time?**

When asked what respondents do in their free time, they overwhelming said they spend time with their friends and/or family (78%) and reading (74.5%). Cooking at home (56.8%) and pursuing outdoor (52.4%) and physical (51.4%) activities and gardening (50.7%) were also favored recreational pursuits. 44.6% said visiting the library was among their free time activities.

Among the comments for “Other” ways respondents spend their free time top responses included, going to the beaches, walking, and enjoying the island’s natural beauty. Pursuing hobbies, playing and listening to music, spending time with family and participating in spiritual community and volunteering were also frequently mentioned.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Spending time with friends and/or family | 78.13% | 450 |
| Reading | 74.48% | 429 |
| Cooking at home | 56.77% | 327 |
| Outdoor activities (e.g. hiking, golfing, bocce, tennis, etc.) | 52.43% | 302 |
| Physical activities (e.g. yoga, running, swimming, cycling, etc.) | 51.39% | 296 |
| Gardening | 50.69% | 292 |
| Creating / making (e.g. art, crafts, writing, etc.) | 45.49% | 262 |
| Visiting the library | 44.62% | 257 |
| Dining out | 42.01% | 242 |
| Traveling | 36.28% | 209 |
| Volunteering | 35.94% | 207 |
| Socializing online (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) | 32.99% | 190 |
| Water sports (e.g. boating, sailing, kayaking, etc.) | 26.04% | 150 |
| Other (please specify) | 20.49% | 118 |
| Shopping | 20.31% | 117 |
| Social / affinity / professional clubs (e.g. Rotary, Veterans, St. Peter’s, Sceptics Society, etc.) | 15.80% | 91 |
| Electronic games | 8.16% | 47 |
| Trivia nights / bingo / game nights | 5.21% | 30 |
|  | **Answered** | **576** |
|  | **Skipped** | **4** |

**Q4 Libraries are always evolving spaces for community, learning, connection, and access. In your opinion, which of the following support the purpose of the library?**

In answer to how libraries are spaces for community, learning, connection, and access, 77% of respondents selected community meeting space as the primary purpose of a library in the community, followed by a research center for history and archival information at 75.3%. Support of arts and culture (68.6%), reading (68.6%) and dedicated study (66.3%) areas, as well as programming for children (65.9%) adults (63.2%), afterschool (62.1%) and literacy/equivalency (60.2%) followed closely. 43.5% want support for self directed learning and homeschool programming. The desire to access digital resources (57.7%), digital materials (52.8%) and technical assistance and training (40.7%) was also strongly expressed. Collaborative space (44.9%) for job/career (50.1%), community/group (43.7%), creative (30.4%) and business/economic (23.4%) development pursuits were seen as an important function of libraries.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Community meeting space | 77.09% | 434 |
| Archival and/or local history research center | 75.31% | 424 |
| Arts and culture support | 68.56% | 386 |
| Reading room | 68.56% | 386 |
| Dedicated study space | 66.25% | 373 |
| Early childhood education, family literacy, story times | 65.90% | 371 |
| Educational seminars | 63.23% | 356 |
| Afterschool programming | 62.17% | 350 |
| Basic reading and high school equivalency classes | 60.21% | 339 |
| Digital resource access and electronic device lending | 57.73% | 325 |
| Digitally formatted materials | 52.75% | 297 |
| Job and career resources | 50.09% | 282 |
| Collaborative spaces | 44.94% | 253 |
| Community organization / group support | 43.69% | 246 |
| Self-directed learning and homeschooling support | 43.52% | 245 |
| Technical assistance and training | 40.67% | 229 |
| Visitor information | 36.77% | 207 |
| Makerspace for innovation and creative projects | 30.37% | 171 |
| Nontraditional library materials (e.g. musical instruments, tools, mobile devices, toys) | 25.93% | 146 |
| ​Business / economic development support | 23.45% | 132 |
| Other (please specify) | 20.43% | 115 |
|  | **Answered** | **563** |
|  | **Skipped** | **17** |

As one respondent commented, “I dream of a library that serves all of the above – a learning, living, socializing community center. A place where so many people go to so many things that one comes to expect to be in the library multiple times a week and to see friends and neighbors there...”

**Q5** **How often do you visit the Sawyer Free Library?**

The majority of respondents (30.6%) visit the library at least once a week. 27.9% visit once a month. Almost half of respondents are infrequent library users, with 6.7% never visiting.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| At least once a week | 30.57% | 173 |
| At least once a month | 27.92% | 158 |
| A few times a year | 23.50% | 133 |
| Once a year or less | 11.31% | 64 |
| Never | 6.71% | 38 |
|  | **Answered** | **566** |
|  | **Skipped** | **14** |

**Q6 What prevents you from using the library more often?**

Time (32.8%), downtown parking (23.7%) and greater accessibility elsewhere (18.1%) were the strongest responses to why people might not use the library. 41.8% provided a range of commentary that reflect the listed results; everything from exclamations of “Boring!” and comments about the building and difficulty getting there, to accolades about library services.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| I have other reasons for not using the library (please specify): | 41.75% | 210 |
| I am too busy. | 32.80% | 165 |
| Parking downtown is difficult. | 23.66% | 119 |
| Everything I can get from the library, I get elsewhere. | 18.09% | 91 |
| I don’t know what information, resources or programs are offered through the library. | 13.72% | 69 |
| The hours don’t work for my schedule. | 13.52% | 68 |
| The library is uncomfortable and uninviting. | 10.93% | 55 |
| There’s not enough quiet or dedicated work/study space. | 9.34% | 47 |
| I use another library. | 8.75% | 44 |
| I don’t want to wait for materials to become available. | 7.16% | 36 |
| I am concerned about safety at the library. | 5.17% | 26 |
| I have physical limitations that make it difficult to visit the library. | 4.57% | 23 |
| The library doesn’t have what I need. | 4.57% | 23 |
| I don’t feel welcomed at the library. | 3.78% | 19 |
| It’s not easy to find what I’m looking for at the library. | 3.78% | 19 |
| I lack transportation. | 2.39% | 12 |
| The location is inconvenient for me. | 2.39% | 12 |
| Libraries are old-fashioned and boring. | 1.79% | 9 |
| I owe fines to the library. | 1.39% | 7 |
|  | **Answered** | **503** |
|  | **Skipped** | **77** |

**Q7 How often do you use library’s online collections and resources?**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Never | 36.97% | 210 |
| At least once a month | 18.31% | 104 |
| A few times a year | 16.90% | 96 |
| At least once a week | 15.67% | 89 |
| Once a year or less | 12.15% | 69 |
|  | **Answered** | **568** |
|  | **Skipped** | **12** |

When asked if respondents use the library online services, 37% said never. As one respondent explained, “Mainly I am ignorant of what the library currently offers and have sufficient resources elsewhere to meet my needs - in other words, I do not know what I might be missing! However, another respondent said, “… Though I only visit the library's physical location monthly, I use the library's resources daily. OverDrive is an essential part of my day.”

**Q8 If you use other libraries, which ones do you use?**

In response to what other libraries people use, fewer than half answered the question. Overwhelming the other libraries used are Beverly, Boston, Rockport and Manchester Public Libraries. The reasons given are generally about better amenities and access.

**Demographic Profile**

The majority of respondents identify as female (68.8%) and white/Caucasian (92.5%). Boomers make up the greatest number of respondents with 27.9 % between ages 65-74 and 26.1% between ages 55-64. Respondents predominantly speak (99.8%) and read (84.75%) English, and are highly educated holding Masters (34.8%), Bachelors (32.3%) and Doctoral (7.4%) degrees. 30.50% state they are employed fulltime, while 27.7% are retired. 94.1% are year-round residents. 25.7% live in the Downtown/Harbor neighborhood. Another 21.6% live in East Gloucester and 14.6% live in West Gloucester. 44% of respondents have lived in Gloucester for longer than 11 years while another 16.9% have lived in Gloucester less than 5 years.

Beyond these highlights, there is an interesting story in the numbers:

While 29.2% of respondents identified as male, 2% of respondents identified as non binary.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Female | 68.79% | 368 |
| Male | 29.16% | 156 |
| Other: does not identify | 1.12% | 6 |
| Other: does identify | 0.93% | 5 |
|  | **Answered** | **535** |
|  | **Skipped** | **45** |

29.8% of respondents are Gen X (35-54) and 9.3% (18-34) are Millennial, compared to the 54% from the Boomer generation. This correlates to the age profile of Gloucester overall.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 65-74 | 27.93% | 150 |
| 55-64 | 26.07% | 140 |
| 45-54 | 18.25% | 98 |
| 35-44 | 11.55% | 62 |
| 25-34 | 7.64% | 41 |
| 75 or older | 6.70% | 36 |
| 18-24 | 1.68% | 9 |
| 12-17 | 0.19% | 1 |
| Under 12 | 0.00% | 0 |
|  | **Answered** | **537** |
|  | **Skipped** | **43** |

There was a mix of “Other” (5.4%) responses to specifying ethnicity, mainly expressing European roots or a blend, along the order of “Human Mutt” and multiracial. Gloucester’s racial diversity was identified in community outreach forums as desirable and positive and a goal for the future.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| White | 92.51% | 482 |
| Other (please specify) | 5.37% | 28 |
| Hispanic / Latinx | 0.96% | 5 |
| Native American | 0.58% | 3 |
| Black / African American | 0.38% | 2 |
| Asian / Pacific Islander | 0.19% | 1 |
|  | **Answered** | **521** |
|  | **Skipped** | **59** |

Of those who responded to the survey, very few speak other languages at home or work. Among the primary home languages were Portuguese, Spanish, Italian (Sicilian), German, Dutch, Arabic, and Czech. Two speak American Sign Language at home. Of those who responded, nine speak Spanish at work/school/public, while two speak Japanese and one speaks Portuguese and French. 9% read in another language other than English: predominantly Spanish, French, Italian and German.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Speak at home: | 99.81% | 517 |
| Speak at work/school/public: | 82.63% | 428 |
| Read in: | 84.75% | 439 |
|  | **Answered** | **518** |
|  | **Skipped** | **62** |

While the majority of respondents hold advanced degrees, respondents reflect a variety of educational and training levels that potentially speak to the working-class character and diversity of the population.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Master’s degree | 34.76% | 187 |
| Bachelor’s degree | 32.34% | 174 |
| Some college, no degree | 8.74% | 47 |
| Associate’s degree | 7.43% | 40 |
| Doctorate degree | 7.43% | 40 |
| High school graduate or equivalent | 5.58% | 30 |
| Trade / technical / vocational training | 2.79% | 15 |
| Some high school, no diploma | 0.93% | 5 |
|  | **Answered** | **538** |
|  | **Skipped** | **42** |

Though most respondents say they are employed full time, 9.8% are employed part-time and another 2.6% hold multiple jobs. 9.1% own businesses, 3.9% are entre- or solo-preneurs, and 2.8% are independent contractors. 2.2% parent full time, and another 1.7% are homemakers.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Employed full time | 30.50% | 165 |
| Retired | 27.73% | 150 |
| Employed part time | 9.80% | 53 |
| Business owner | 9.06% | 49 |
| Entrepreneur / solopreneur | 3.88% | 21 |
| Unemployed, looking for work | 3.14% | 17 |
| Independent contractor | 2.77% | 15 |
| Employed multiple jobs | 2.59% | 14 |
| Unable to work | 2.59% | 14 |
| Volunteer | 2.40% | 13 |
| Full time parent | 2.22% | 12 |
| Homemaker | 1.66% | 9 |
| Student | 0.92% | 5 |
| Home care provider | 0.37% | 2 |
| Unemployed, not looking for work | 0.37% | 2 |
| Military | 0.00% | 0 |
|  | **Answered** | **541** |
|  | **Skipped** | **39** |

As with previous questions, the 4.6% of responses to “Other”, were a mix of comments including living elsewhere on Cape Ann, splitting residency between Cape Ann and another location, and being homeless.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Year-round Gloucester resident | 94.10% | 510 |
| Summer / seasonal Gloucester resident | 1.29% | 7 |
| Other (please specify) | 4.61% | 25 |
|  | **Answered** | **542** |
|  | **Skipped** | **38** |

There was a good distribution of responses from all neighborhoods, while the harbor area generated the most.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Downtown / Harbor | 25.70% | 137 |
| East Gloucester | 21.58% | 115 |
| West Gloucester | 14.63% | 78 |
| Riverdale | 10.51% | 56 |
| Lanesville | 8.07% | 43 |
| Magnolia | 5.63% | 30 |
| Annisquam | 5.44% | 29 |
| Portuguese Hill | 5.07% | 27 |
| Bayview | 2.63% | 14 |
| The Fort | 0.75% | 4 |
|  | **Answered** | **533** |
|  | **Skipped** | **47** |

The responses to the how long respondents have lived in Gloucester possibly reflect the changing face of Gloucester’s population in attracting more people from “over the bridge” who are looking for a lifestyle community with an ocean view. That said, 29% have a legacy connection with Gloucester.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 11+ years | 43.97% | 237 |
| Less than 5 years | 16.88% | 91 |
| All my life | 16.51% | 89 |
| 6-10 years | 13.17% | 71 |
| Generations | 9.46% | 51 |
|  | **Answered** | **539** |
|  | **Skipped** | **41** |

**Conclusions**

In the final analysis, the attributes of Place, Belonging and Connection are foundational values and desires of the Gloucester community. And Community is paramount. Participants in the Community Strategic Planning initiative are representative of the extended community and provide clear, useful guidance about what matters to Gloucester’s people and becoming the library the community deserves. Their greatest concern is losing the unique character that makes Gloucester special, its history, traditions, eccentricities, when so much has already changed in such a short timeframe. The future is difficult to conceive, and the Committee took great care and deliberation in developing questions that indeed did capture the Spirit of Community. The results are consistent with what we anticipated at the beginning of the project: that people care deeply about their community, history and institutions, and they are hopeful for a future in which diversity is embraced, children are safe and educated, and adults have opportunities to sustain both home and work lives. As a civic, egalitarian space, the library is a hub of their intellectual and communal lives. It is the Community’s center for connection, access, and learning.

The feedback is positive and the good will is strong. People want a library that reflects their community values. There is tremendous energy and passion fueling their desire to see the library become the institution they deserve and want. There is incredible willingness to participate in the growth of the library. They need to be meaningfully engaged, because essentially they don’t know the library needs them and vice versa. What is clear is that people who use the Sawyer Free Library will use it regardless. What is also clear is that the Sawyer Free Library has a challenge to attract people who have outdated perceptions about the purpose libraries serve or else feel marginalized. While Sawyer Free can’t be all things to all people, it can reinvigorate its relationship with the community to shift perceptions and build connections that expand its reach throughout the community.

The areas of focus for the next five years are: Communicating, Partnering and Community Engagement. Libraries are taken for granted, assumed they’ll always be there. Participants value the library exists, and very much want the library to thrive. They don’t know what the library needs from them, especially if they don’t have a current need for the library. Libraries serve the public. And the public wants to reciprocate. It just needs to be asked.

The project succeeded through its openness to connect and listen appreciatively to the opinions and feedback of a spectrum of the community. And they were delighted to be asked for their input. It awakened a number of participants to rethink their relationship to the Sawyer Free Library and reconsider how to become involved. One participant reported she got a library card for the first time since she moved here years ago. Others very much wanted to share their ideas for the library of the future.

**Recommendations:**

Focus on two-way communication. People are overwhelmed with information and pressed for time. Make it easy for people to navigate information about services and programming. Leverage a multimedia approach to providing information about resources and events. Invite the community to respond with their input.

Collaborate with non-profits, businesses, associations, and government to co-sponsor and co-brand synergistic activities. People respond positively to public partnerships among artists, writers, musicians, historians, environmentalist, conservationists etc and the various organizations that support and showcase them such as the Bookstore, Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester Marine Genomics Institute, and YMCA. And seek opportunities to initiate partnerships with service agencies and, as one participant suggested, the library can work with local artists to create a lending library of their art to take home to enjoy. Another suggestion was to develop an archive of oral histories before the stories are forgotten.

Engage Community. thinkGloucester has been an effective campaign and is positively associated with the idea of Connecting to Community. Sawyer Free Library can continue to use this tool to reach out to the community and foster participation and solicit feedback and share information. Becoming open to the voices of the community is what this project was all about and in the end has provided the library the vehicle to demonstrate its intention to stay open and listen.

The aspiration for the 2019-2024 Strategic Plan is:

Vision: Become the library Gloucester deserves to have

Mission: Engage community at all levels (demographic and democratic) on every occasion

Goals: Communicate | Collaborate | Include

**Last Words:**

At the end of each focus group, we asked participants to complete the following sentence.

Dear Sawyer Free Library, I want you to know:

* You’re still relevant and important.
* I’m pretty sure I returned [the book] in second grade but I’m afraid to find out.
* That I’m excited for the future that you will help shape.
* That we still love books.
* I wish I could come to the library more often.
* That I’m grateful for everything you do.
* That you are very important.
* You have potential.
* You should do better.
* You are important for people and the community.
* You’re appreciated.
* We will help you.
* I’m here.
* We want to be part of the community with you.
* You are important to our community.
* I’m grateful and very lucky I have this library.
* I appreciate you want to know what folks have to say.
* Keep listening to the community.
* You’re a great resource for Gloucester.
* I look forward to seeing the changes you’ll be making.
* You’re a great place to research whatever questions we have.