

BELLINGHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY

FY2026-2030

STRATEGIC PLAN

A five-year plan of action



A library is a path to the future - find yours there.

Mary Higgins Clark

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Our library continues to be a constant for our children, students, and adults in our community. The library is constantly evolving to meet the needs and changes that are in our world. We have been blessed with a great director and staff to implement all of this for our community.

-Ann Odabashian
Bellingham Select Board



1894

South Main Street



1930

Common Street



1989

Blackstone Street

This plan was unanimously approved by Library Board of Trustees, September 12, 2024

Nicole Buckley, Chair
Macala Lamour, Vice Chair
Lynn Scornavacca, Secretary
Laura Howard
Kim O'Neal

From the Director

The Bellingham Public Library is a community resource open to the public. We strive to be a place of education, entertainment, and opportunity. Libraries were founded to provide access to information and books, and that is still our primary function, but the library has become so much more.

Our collections are not only physical books, for decades they have also included audiovisual materials. In recent years, we have focused on expanding our digital collections to provide access to library materials in a digital format (books, audiobooks, movies, music, and magazines). We also have shifted our reference collections from print to electronic. You can now find journal and newspaper articles, as well as genealogy resources, online courses, language learning and so much more. Many of these can be accessed remotely and all are available 24/7.

Libraries are also expanding programming. We offer more than just story times for children. In addition to preschool programming for children, there are after school programs for children in grades 4 to 12, as well as family programs for children of all ages. Our programs for adults are cultural, educational and creative. We host many community groups from Girl & Boy Scout Troops to local condo groups.

We are the place community members turn to for Internet access, whether it is from our wired Public Access Computers, Wi-Fi network available throughout the building or our Internet-to-go Wi-Fi Hotspots and Chromebooks with data plans.

This plan is the result of two community surveys, a focus group meeting with library staff, and two focus group meetings with a diverse group of library stakeholders. Thank you to the members of our Strategic Planning Committee Members:

Karen Ares (BHS Internship Coordinator), Shannon Barca (Principal Stall Brook School), Nicole Buckley (Library Trustee), Jack DeDominici (Senior Tax Work Off Staff), Abigail Drake (Teen Patron), Lorien Drake (DiPietro Elementary Staff, Patron and Parent), Josie Dutil (Senior Center Director), Linda Godfrey (Preschool Grandparent), Terri Graham (Senior Center Assistant Director), Brenda Griffin (Friends of the Library), Mike Hennessey (Select Board), Macala Lamour (Library Trustee and Homeschooling Parent), Ann Odabashian (Select Board), Ernie Pelletier (Local Business Owner and Patron), Lindsey Resto (Stall Brook ESL Coordinator and ASK Parent), Lynn Scornavacca (Candidate for Library Trustee), Jennifer Shelley (Bellingham Business Association), Shahin Smith (Library Patron), and Cassie Vagianos (Homeschooling Parent).

It is my great pleasure to serve the Bellingham Community as your Library Director and look forward to bringing these new goals, based on input from stakeholders, to the Bellingham Community!

Cordially,

Bernadette Rivard

Bernadette Rivard
Library Director

Why make a Strategic Plan?

The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) requires libraries to complete and submit multi-year strategic plans to be eligible for direct grants from the MBLC under the federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) program or any state funded grants.

A strategic plan is also a management tool for the library administration and the town. The planning process enabled us to engage with many members of our community to talk about the library, its programs and services, and their vision for the library. It helped us identify our strengths, look for opportunities, express our aspirations and create goals that will, when completed, yield positive results for our community. It also assists in planning budgets and creates a clear sense of purpose for the library staff, trustees, Friends and volunteers.

As a trustee, I am proud to support the Bellingham Library, a vital community foundation. It serves as a hub for education, engagement, and enrichment. Our commitment is to ensure the library remains a dynamic and relevant resource for all residents, now and into the future.

-Nicole Buckley
Chair, Library Board of Trustees

Bellingham Library Mission

The Bellingham Public Library is dedicated to empowering all community members by providing access to knowledge, fostering creativity, and promoting recreational opportunities and lifelong learning in a welcoming, inclusive environment.

Bellingham Library Vision

The hub of the community...Where people and ideas come together.



METHODOLOGY

This planning process has given us the opportunity to examine our past activities, programs, facility and staff, critique our present service, and set goals to work toward the future.

The results in this report are the results of two community surveys, one staff focus group and two community focus groups.

The first survey was to gather information about our current programs and services and get feedback from the community on how we are doing and what we might be missing.

Community Survey Current Programs & Services

Visitors & Hours

- 87% had visited the library in the last year
- Half who had not visited stated it was because they were too busy
- Less than 9% stated hours were not convenient
- Increase hours
 - 30% wished for Saturday morning hours in the summer
 - 20% wished for Friday afternoon hours (starting September 2024 we will be staying open until 5 pm on Fridays.)

Library Programs & Events

- Two-thirds of respondents find out about library happenings on social media or the library calendar
- 50% find out from our electronic newsletter
- One-third from our print press release in the Bellingham Bulletin.

Library Facility Priorities

- 69% Outdoor seating and programming area (this has been funded and should be open in the spring of 2025)
- 64% Creative space
- 52% café area - opened in 2019
- 43-44% Small and medium meeting rooms
- 33-37% Family/single use restrooms and large meeting rooms

Customer Service

- 92% of respondents are extremely or very satisfied with the library customer service

Rated most important library services

- 57% access to materials from our library/library network
- 49% online resources
- 33% access to and assistance with computers and internet
- 23% Library website and assistance from library staff
- 9-17% Study spaces, reserved meeting rooms and programs



Collections & Programming

Rated most important print

- 76% Fiction books
- 75% New titles by popular authors
- 51% Mysteries and nonfiction
- 19-33% Magazines, Large Print & Science Fiction

Rated most important nonprint

- 79% Museum passes
- 43% Library of Things
- 19% Books on CD & DVDs
- 9-11% Video Games and Music CDs

Rated most important nonprint

- 57% eBooks and eAudio
- 42% Online Language Learning and Online Courses
- 33-38% Online Tutoring, Genealogy Resources, Job Seeker Resources
- 22% Digital Magazines, Movies & TV
- 15% Digital Music

Programs most likely to attend

- 56% Craft Programs
- 41-46% Book Clubs, Author Talks & Art Shows
- 38% Topical Lectures
- 29% Community Forums
- 13-17% Computer Training and Job and Career Assistance

Services to children

Top library service to children

- 61% Programs for ages 0-10
- 37-38% Programs for ages 11-17
- 30-33% Online resources for youth and access to youth materials from our library/library network
- 19-22% Assistance from librarians and access to and assistance with computers.

Rated most important print collection for children and teens

- 74-77% Series and Chapter Books
- 66% Nonfiction
- 52-57% Picture Books & Graphic Novels
- 39% Board Books

Rated most important nonprint collection for children and teens

- 37% Kits and Games
- 23% Wonderbooks
- 16-17% Books on CD and Video Games
- 7-11% Music CDs and DVDs

Rated most important online collection for children and teens

- 52% Tutoring Help
- 45% Ebooks
- 36% Lesson Plans



Community Survey Future Program & Services

What are the characteristics of a thriving community?

- Community engagement and inclusivity
- Safety and well-being
- Educational and cultural opportunities
- Economic stability and opportunity
- Effective governance and infrastructure

What essential service is lacking in the Town of Bellingham that would greatly enhance your quality of life?

- Community and recreation spaces
- Improved public transportation and walkability
- Better communication and information accessibility
- More diverse and frequent community events
- Enhanced child and adult recreation opportunities

Share words that you would hope to use to describe the Bellingham Public Library in the future.

- Welcoming
- Inclusive
- Accessible
- Friendly
- Fun
- Helpful

During the focus group meetings, the following priorities for the Town of Bellingham were identified.

Please rank these in importance to you.

Rank	Topic
#1	Educational support
#2	Community health
#3	Environmental development and education
#4	Infrastructure development
#5	Inclusion initiatives
#6	Economic development
#7	Social support systems

During the library's focus group meetings, the following priorities were identified for the library.

Please rank them in importance to you.

- #1 Developing inclusive programming
- #2 Enhancing digital literacy and accessibility
- #3 Building strong community partnerships and civic engagement
- #4 Increasing community support services
- #5 Expanding multicultural resources



From the information gathered from the focus groups, the following priorities for both the library and the Town of Bellingham have been identified. Based on the extensive lists of strengths, opportunities, aspirations and community needs captured in the focus groups, below are the priorities the library will be focusing on over the next five years. Focusing on these areas will likely increase the library's relevance and impact within the community.

GOALS

1. Develop Multilingual and Inclusive Programming

Create inclusive programs that serve to all age groups and abilities, ensuring the library is a welcoming space for everyone.

- a. Reflecting the diversity of the community, the library will focus on expanding its multicultural resources and bilingual books, especially for children. Hosting language classes and conversation circles that meet the needs of both immigrants and residents interested in learning new languages.
- b. Create inclusive programs that serve all groups and abilities, including enhanced programs for individuals with disabilities, ensuring the library is a welcoming space for everyone.
- c. Continue to expand collections (books and other formats) that are multilingual and also written in native languages to be more reflective of the needs of Bellingham.

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 1

- Offer more STEM programming.
- Increase services to immigrant and other minority communities.
- Increase services to community members with special needs and those who are neurodiverse.
- Provide programs that educate on the acceptance of differences.



2. Enhance Digital Literacy and Accessibility

As technology continues to play a crucial role in everyday life, the library will prioritize expanding offerings related to digital literacy.

- a. Increase the availability of technology help sessions, expand access to computers and high-speed internet, and provide workshops on using online resources and digital tools effectively.
- b. Address the digital divide by expanding the availability of hotspots and Library of Things to include more devices and educational tools that patrons can check out and use at home.

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 2

- Resume the “Book a Librarian” sessions to assist those who need assistance with technology and to address the digital divide.
- Evaluate the strength and reach of the library’s WiFi network.
- Evaluate the role of AI in reference services.
- Create a video that provides an introduction to the library and library resources.



3. Building Strong Community Partnerships and Expanding Physical Spaces

Strengthen the relationship with local schools, businesses and cultural organizations to offer joint programs. Expand the physical space to accommodate more community oriented features.

- a. Enrich the library's offerings to increase community engagement.
- b. Expand library space to offer more leisure programs.
- c. Work with Bellingham Public Schools to ensure that teachers, parents and administrators are well informed about the resources available at the library.

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 3

- Expand joint programs with community partners, including art and photography shows, local author events and business expos.
- Explore options for increasing the flexibility of spaces for event use.
- Expand outdoor area to include a garden.
- Maintain a solid relationship with the Bellingham schools' administration and host an annual teacher orientation.



4. Increase Community Support Services

Develop programs and services that offer community support.

- a. Expand support services by focusing on mental health needs, parenting, job skills and development and new resident orientations.
- b. To foster a more engaged citizenry, develop programs that encourage civic engagement and awareness, such as hosting local government candidate forums, town service introductions, and local issue workshops.

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 4

- Provide programs that support the mental health needs of the community.
- Provide space for and support local parenting groups.
- Explore opportunities to support the job skills and career development of community members.
- Host annual new resident orientations.



5. Library Facility

Maintain a modern library facility that provides a welcoming, functional space to the community.

- a. Maintain and remodel interior and exterior spaces in the building to best meet the needs of the community.
- b. Explore options that are environmentally friendly and energy saving.

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 5

- Paint interior spaces in the building that have not been painted in the past 5 years.
- Replace all exterior windows that have not been replaced in the past 10 years.
- Update CFL lighting to LED lighting throughout the building, for both aesthetics and energy savings. Explore grant opportunities to fund this project.
- Remodel all restrooms. Explore the possibility of including at least one family restroom that has an adult sized toilet and automatic doors.
- Increase storage space by adding a shed to the property as part of the outdoor improvement plan.
- Explore energy efficient, environmentally friendly options for library services and facilities, including: a generator, EV charging, solar panels, and a community garden/composting site.
- Explore options to increase parking for library patrons.
- Replace the 30+ year old carpeting in the Children's Program Room to LVT.
- Relocate library network equipment from staff area to area where town network equipment is located.

BELLINGHAM HISTORY AND GROWTH

Bellingham is bordered on the east by Franklin and Wrentham, on the south by Woonsocket, Rhode Island, on the west by Blackstone, Mendon, and Hopedale, and on the northwest and north by Milford and Medway.

- Early settlers were Quakers and Baptists seeking religious freedom from the Puritans.
- In 1719 Bellingham became the most southerly town incorporated in Norfolk County.
- In the 1800s, Bellingham was a farming and mill (mainly boot making) community.
- The long, narrow shape of the town was settled by three distinct ethnic groups, Caryville in the north by the Polish and Irish, center of town by the English, and the southern section, by the Rhode Island border, French speaking Canadians who worked in the mills in Woonsocket.
- The end of WWII brought housing developments on farmland, which doubled the population in 10 years.
- Interstate 495 opened in Bellingham in the late 1960s.
- Population increase led to the building of new schools, two, which currently serve grades 4-12, are within walking distance of the library.
- The 1990s to current day we see the growth of residential, commercial and industrial businesses with apartment complexes, power plants, shopping plazas and distribution centers.



BELLINGHAM LIBRARY HISTORY AND GROWTH

- In 1894 Bellingham's first library was opened in a private residence on South Main Street and was eventually moved to the Massey School.
- In 1929 the town appropriated \$10,000 to build a new library on land adjacent to the Town Hall on Common Street. The building was dedicated on May 15, 1930.
- Branches operated in the North School, Stall Brook Elementary School, and Keough School.
- Children's Room opened in the basement of the Common Street library in 1972.
- In 1978 the town hired its first professional librarian, formed the Friends of the Library and lobbied for additional staff and funding, and also started planning for expanding library space.
- In 1985 the Library Building Committee used State Aid funding to hire an architect to design a new library.
- In August of 1987 voters approved the construction of a new \$2 million library to be built on Blackstone Street. The building opened to the public on September 5, 1989.
- Over the past 15 years we have remodeled or renovated most public spaces in the building including: added a dedicated Teen Room with a Study Room; opened a Café space in the study area of the library; renovated the Local History Room and created a Conference Room; renovated the Community Room and Community Room Kitchen; updated the Children's Room with new carpeting, educational toys, and increased our public parking area by adding 16 spaces.



STANDARDS OF LIBRARY SERVICE

Below are the legal requirements for State Aid to libraries in Massachusetts in order to provide the minimum standards for library service. The Bellingham Public Library has consistently met these requirements.

The library is open to everyone with no charge for normal services.

The Bellingham library is open to all.

A library with a population of 15,000 to 24,999 residents must be open 50 hours a week, including some part of five days, including evening hours.

The library is currently open 6 days a week during the school year, 55 hours a week: Monday through Thursday 9:30 am to 8 pm; Friday 9:30 am to 5 pm and Saturday 9:30 am to 3 pm.

The library employs trained library personnel, including a Director with a degree from an approved Graduate School of Library and Information Science and a Certificate of Professional Librarianship from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC).

The Director, Bernadette Rivard, has a Master of Library Science, Library and Information Science from Simmons University and a Certificate of Librarianship from the MBLC, #P5302.

Libraries with a population between 15,000 and 24,999 shall spend a minimum percentage of 15% of the library's total annual budget for books and periodicals.

The library has continually met or exceeded this requirement.

The library lends books to other libraries in the Commonwealth and extends privileges to the holders of cards issued by other certified public libraries in the Commonwealth on a reciprocal basis.

The library meets this requirement.

The library has filed its annual ARIS and State Aid reports to verify the library has met the standards set forth by the MBLC.

The library has met the standards since 1979, with waivers applied for and granted during difficult financial years.



ELEMENTS OF QUALITY LIBRARY SERVICE

The Bellingham Public Library embraces the following fundamentals which constitute quality library service:

- A **building** that is inviting, user-friendly for all, comfortable and with numerous locations for staff use, private use, study use and group events. Over the past 10 years we have renovated most public spaces in the library building.
- A **staff** that is dedicated to library patrons and customer service. Much of our staff are long-term employees, ranging from less than one year to 38 years of service. The average staff member has been here more than 13 years.
- A current and useful **collection of materials** to meet the popular needs and interests of the community. We add nearly 350 items to our collection each month and our collection has remained between 50 and 52K items for the past few years.
- A simple set of **by-laws** for the trustees and a clearly-written policy for all library practices adopted by the Board of Library Trustees. The Trustee bylaws were reviewed and updated in 2018.
- A fully operational **computer/information system** for personal work and for linking Bellingham to thousands of users and millions of materials in Massachusetts and beyond. We are members of the CW MARS library network and our Internet for both staff and the public are through that network.
- **Informed and supportive trustees** who have the courage to advocate for adequate and above-average services at the local level.
- **Trustees** charged with the responsibility to secure adequate library funding for maintenance, materials, programming and staffing.
- An ongoing **planning process** to meet the needs of the community, including young adult/children's services and adult programs.
- Promotion of programs and services through effective **marketing and publicity** is essential to the continued growth of the library.
- We are a **community activities center** and we encourage the use of our facilities where availability and space allows.

