

# Peabody Institute Library of Danvers Strategic Plan 2020 - 2023

## Strategic Planning Committee:

Natalie Luca Fiore, Chair

Becca Crockett

Alex Lent

Jennifer McGeorge

Jim Riordan

Barry Robertson

Leif Rochna

Julie Silk

Submitted to and approved by the Board of Trustees on February 13, 2019

# Introduction

In June 2018, the Board of Trustees of the Peabody Institute Library of Danvers established the Strategic Planning Committee to gather information from the community and use that information to create a new plan to guide the Library's next three years of service to Danvers.

To do so, the Committee conducted a survey, held focus groups and community forums, and drew from the results of the Town's 2016 resident satisfaction study. All told, information was drawn from over 1000 feedback instruments. All of this information was distilled and combined with staff input to create this new strategic plan.

The themes and priorities that follow will guide the Library's next three years of service to the community. The Library Leadership Team will return to these themes and priorities as we develop our yearly action plans.

This plan was created for the Danvers community and it was created by the Danvers community. The Board of Trustees gave the Committee the time it needed to gather and understand the needs of the community. Residents were generous with their time and thoughts in responding to surveys and participating in focus groups and meetings. Staff members provided thoughts and expertise that can only be found through years of experience and service. All of these parts came together to result in a new plan and a renewed vision for the future of Danvers' library.

Alex Lent  
Library Director  
February 2019

# Methodology and Major Results

To assess the needs of the community, the Strategic Planning Committee conducted a survey and held multiple focus groups, including with teens, adults, senior citizens, and self-identified non-users of the library. Both methods - survey and focus groups - used the same set of questions, increasing the validity of the study. These questions were selected in order to encourage respondents to consider the community as a whole, rather than to focus exclusively on the library. Only short-answer questions were used, in order to encourage out-of-the-box thinking, and to avoid unnecessarily limiting participants' responses.

1. What is most important to you about Danvers?
2. What do you wish you could do in Danvers that you can't currently do in Danvers?
3. In your opinion, what are the biggest obstacles Danvers will face over the next few years?
4. If you rarely or never use the Library, what are some of the reasons you don't use the Library more often?
5. If you are a Library user, what are some of the things that you like, love, or value most about the Library?
6. What would you most like to see at the Library in the next few years?
7. How do you see the Library contributing to the future of Danvers?
8. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?

The resulting responses were rich with detail. Because only short-answer questions were asked, all responses had to be manually coded. The Committee selected an inductive rather than deductive coding method, so that codes would emerge out of the data rather than be forced upon the data.

Responses were coded and then grouped into broader categories or 'priorities'. Once these priorities were identified, the Committee held a community forum to share the in-process results and check if the public felt they rang true, which the attendees indicated that they did. This in-process check-in further increased the validity of the study. The verified priorities were then ranked by frequency and organized into themes. These themes and priorities - gathered from the community, organized by the Committee, checked against the community, and then further refined by the Committee - became the heart of this new strategic plan.

The results strongly represent residents' great appreciation of Danvers' sense of community. It is clear that to residents, the most important challenge facing Danvers is the need to maintain that sense of community while simultaneously growing and changing with the times. Respondents pointed to the library's robust collections, helpful and friendly service, engaging events, and beautiful facilities as "important resources to the town" but also identified the library not just as a resource, not just as part of the community, but as "a source of community" that "brings [everyone] together ... regardless of political or socioeconomic status."

It is fitting, then, that the Library's mission parallels the Town's mission: to maintain the resources, services, events, and facilities that Danvers has always loved, while innovating to find new ways to serve the changing community. As one respondent wrote, "The library has the unique opportunity of bridging the gap between what has always made Danvers great in the past to what will continue to keep it great in the future. It is a dynamic institution that has always responded to the needs of the community."

# Vision, Themes, and Priorities

**Vision:** Danvers' library is a center for community and curiosity that strengthens our town by enabling all residents to pursue their interests.

## Theme: Institution

**Priority:** Foster and maintain a friendly, creative, and collaborative workplace culture that welcomes different perspectives, embraces change, and eagerly seeks new ways to serve the community.

**Priority:** Empower staff to succeed by providing training in readers' advisory, customer service, technology, and other critical skills.

**Priority:** Remove barriers to service to make the library as easy to use as possible.

## Theme: Community

**Priority:** Increase partnerships with other Town Departments and community organizations to collaboratively offer increased or improved service to residents.

**Priority:** Facilitate the dispersal of community information, and build connections between members of the community and community organizations relevant to their needs and interests.

**Priority:** Increase outreach efforts to expand access to the library beyond 15 Sylvan Street.

## Theme: Awareness and Innovation

**Priority:** Develop and enact a plan for ongoing assessment of community needs and interests, as well as ongoing assessment of library resources, events, and services.

**Priority:** Support innovative ideas that enable the library to serve the community in new ways.

**Priority:** Develop communication strategies that expand the community's awareness of the library, its role in the community, and the resources it provides.

## Theme: Resources and Events

**Priority:** Develop, maintain, and promote resources - physical, electronic, and technological - that meet the needs and advance the interests of the Danvers community.

**Priority:** Preserve and provide increased access to Danvers historical materials through the Archival Center.

**Priority:** Expand event offerings, particularly on weekends and other times when residents are more able to attend.

## Theme: Spaces

**Priority:** Preserve the library's beautiful and historical building while enabling increased and evolving use of its spaces.

**Priority:** Continue to ensure that the library is a welcoming, safe space, accessible for all.

**Priority:** Develop a plan for the maintenance and increased use of Peabody Park.

## About Danvers

Danvers' total population (27,544 in 2017) is projected to increase slightly (less than 1%) over the next three to five years. The composition of the population is also expected to change; age groups that are anticipated to increase are those under 18, 18 to 24-year-olds, and those over 65, with all other age groups expected to stay steady or slightly decline. The highest growth rate will be seen in the under 18 and over 65 categories, which will comprise over 40% of the total population.

Danvers' population is also changing in terms of race and ethnicity. The 2017 U.S. Census Bureau reported the Danvers population as 93.9% White (compared to 97.2% in 2010), 1.2% Black or African American (0.3% in 2010), 2.2% Asian (1.4% in 2010) and 4.3% Hispanic (2.3% in 2010).

# Brief History of the Peabody Institute Library of Danvers

In December 1856, the American banker, philanthropist, and Danvers native George Peabody gave \$10,000 for the establishment of a branch library in Danvers of the Peabody Institute Library of South Danvers (Peabody, Mass). The branch library was initially set up at Danvers Town Hall, and in 1857 Joshua Silvester, Simeon Putnam, and John R. Langley sold to the town for \$4,000 a four and a half acre plot of land on Sylvan Street close to Town Hall for use as a site for the branch library.

In 1866, George Peabody, realizing the difficulty of a single institution set-up in two separate communities, allowed the branch to become independent and gave the new Peabody Institute Library of Danvers an additional \$40,000. A Gothic style library was built at what was named "Peabody Park" in 1869, with the purpose, in the founder's words, "for the promotion of knowledge and morality in the Town of Danvers." The governing body of the Institute was vested in a board of nine Trustees appointed for life by Peabody. Thereafter vacancies were filled by the legal voters of Danvers.

On July 2, 1890, a spectacular fire destroyed the library building. Insurance covered \$23,622 in losses and on September 28, 1891 the trustees, mirroring Peabody's sentiment "Education, a debt due from present to future generations," voted to appropriate money for the erection of a new building. A building committee was appointed, and the Boston architectural firm of Little, Brown and Moore was chosen, with local architect Lester S. Couch doing the bulk of the design, this being his first major project. J. T. Wilson of Nahant was the contractor for the 62' x 92' Georgian Revival structure with total cost for the project at \$34, 218.

The building was dedicated on October 19, 1892, with the library functioning on the first floor and the 1,100 capacity auditorium on the upper level serving all manner of town uses including lecture series, graduations, theatre and minstrel productions, and the like. The public lecture series, known as the Lyceum, included such notable speakers as reformer Lucy Stone, publisher James T. Fields, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. In 1892 the library instituted the Dewey decimal system for identifying books, and in 1896 a separate Children's Room was established. In 1963 a remodeled basement area was created for use as an expanded children's library and stack area.

In 1980, following over a decade of discussion, a renovation and addition costing \$2.2 million was approved by Town Meeting from the plans of architect Oscar Padgen. General contractor for the project was Congress Construction Co., and included 6,000 additional square feet in the old building with the creation of a new floor within the former auditorium. Underground construction on the Mill Pond side of the building created an additional 12,000 sq. feet for children's services, a general purpose meeting room, and the Danvers Archival Center, which collects local history books and manuscripts.

The renovation project design called for the retention of the exterior character of the library and sympathetically treats many original interior features. The Georgian Revival library is a rectangular plan building with low truncated hipped roof with a surrounding balustrade. The foundation is granite and the siding flush boards. The first story exhibits alternating wood quoins, and two oculus windows. The Sylvan Street façade contains a balconied entry portico, now enclosed as a reading area, while the two side façades contain two story elliptical porticos with second floor Ionic support columns. The second floor includes numerous ornamental work including Palladian windows with fanlight and tracery, arched windows with swags, Ionic pilasters and columns, and roof modillion blocks.

In 1997 the Peabody Institute Library of Danvers was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, while the tiring exterior of the library went through an exterior condition assessment. Following Board of Trustees and Town officials' approval, in 1998 Danvers Town Meeting appropriated a 1.4

million dollar exterior renovation and restoration project, with assistance from the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

Architect for the project was Perry, Dean, Rogers & Partners, and the contractor was Consigli Construction. Work took place between 1999 and 2000, and one result of the renovation was to change the “refrigerator” white exterior to its subtly contrasting original beige shades.

In 2015 the Town of Danvers replaced the library HVAC systems. Other interior changes have included reorganizing the top three floors to provide more space for collections, public use computers, and study areas. The large first floor magazine area was named the “Trustee Emeritus Thomas C. Standing Room” and in 2018 converted into a quiet reading area, meeting space, and art gallery. In 2019 a 500 square foot storage area on the lower level was converted to a classroom space.

The grand building situated on a sylvan park exhibits the best features of grace and style of a past age, while functioning as a modern, well equipped, and community-oriented library.

Richard B. Trask  
Town Archivist  
1982 / 2019